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(*SECOND SERIES.*)

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BY

LESLIE STEPHEN.

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*** *The second of these Essays originally appeared in Fraser's Magazine, the third and seventh in the Fortnightly Review, and the remainder in the Cornhill Magazine.*

HOURS IN A LIBRARY.

I.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

"LET me not injure the felicity of others," says Sir Thomas Browne in a suppressed passage of the "Religio Medici," "if I say that I am the happiest man alive. I have that in me that can convert poverty into riches, adversity into prosperity, and I am more invulnerable than Achilles; fortune hath not one place to hit me." Perhaps, on second thoughts, Sir Thomas felt that the phrase savoured of that presumption which is supposed to provoke the wrath of Nemesis; and at any rate, he, of all men, is the last to be taken too literally at his word. He is a humourist to the core, and is here writing dramatically. There are many things in this book, so he tells us, "delivered rhetorically, many expressions therein

merely tropical, . . . and therefore also many things to be taken in a soft and flexible sense, and not to be called unto the rigid test of reason." We shall hardly do wrong in reckoning amongst them this audacious claim to surpassing felicity, as we may certainly include his boast that he "could lose an arm without a tear, and with few groans be quartered into pieces." And yet, if Sir Thomas were to be understood in the most downright literal earnest, perhaps he could have made out as good a case for his assertion as almost any of the troubled race of mankind. For, if we set aside external circumstances of life, what qualities offer a more certain guarantee of happiness than those of which he is an almost typical example? A mind endowed with an insatiable curiosity as to all things knowable and unknowable; an imagination which tinges with poetical hues the vast accumulation of incoherent facts thus stored in a capacious memory; and a strangely vivid humour that is always detecting the quaintest analogies, and, as it were, striking light from the most unexpected collocations of uncompromising materials: such talents are by themselves enough to provide a man with work for life, and to make all his work delightful. To them, moreover, we must add a disposition absolutely incapable of controversial bitterness; "a constitution," as he says of himself, "so

general that it consorts and sympathises with all things;" an absence of all antipathies to loathsome objects in nature—to French "dishes of snails, frogs, and toadstools," or to Jewish repasts on "locusts or grasshoppers;" an equal toleration—which in the first half of the seventeenth century is something astonishing—for all theological systems; an admiration even of our natural enemies, the French, the Spaniards, the Italians, and the Dutch; a love of all climates, of all countries; and, in short, an utter incapacity to "absolutely detest or hate any essence except the devil." Indeed, his hatred even for that personage has in it so little of bitterness, that no man, we may be sure, would have joined more heartily in the Scotch minister's petition for "the puir de'il"—a prayer conceived in the very spirit of his writings. A man so endowed—and it is not only from his explicit assertions, but from his unconscious self-revelation, that we may credit him with closely approaching his own ideal—is admirably qualified to discover one great secret of human happiness. No man was ever better prepared to keep not only one, but a whole stableful of hobbies, nor more certain to ride them so as to amuse himself, without loss of temper or dignity, and without rude collisions against his neighbours. That happy art is given to

few, and thanks to his skill in it, Sir Thomas reminds us strongly of the two illustrious brothers Shandy combined in one person. To the exquisite kindliness and simplicity of Uncle Toby he unites the omnivorous intellectual appetite and the humorous pedantry of the head of the family. The resemblance, indeed, may not be quite fortuitous. Though it does not appear that Sterne, amidst his multifarious pilferings, laid hands upon Sir Thomas Browne, one may fancy that he took a general hint or two from so congenial an author.

The best mode of approaching so original a writer is to examine the intellectual food on which his mind was nourished. He dwelt by preference in strange literary pastures; and their nature will let us into some secrets as to his taste and character. We will begin, therefore, by examining the strange furniture of his mind, as described in his longest, though not his most characteristic book—the "Inquiry into Vulgar Errors." When we turn over its quaint pages, we feel as though we were entering one of those singular museums of curiosities which existed in the pre-scientific ages. Every corner is filled with a strange, incoherent medley, in which really valuable objects are placed side by side with what is simply grotesque

and ludicrous. The modern man of science may find some objects of interest; but they are mixed inextricably with strange rubbish that once delighted the astrologer, the alchemist, or the dealer in apocryphal relics. And the possessor of this miscellaneous collection accompanies us with an unfailing flow of amusing gossip: at one moment pouring forth a torrent of out-of-the-way learning; at another, making a really passable scientific remark; and then lapsing into an elaborate discussion of some inconceivable absurdity; affecting the air of a grave inquirer, and to all appearance fully believing in his own pretensions, and yet somehow indulging himself in a half-suppressed smile, which indicates that the humorous aspect of a question can never be far removed from his mind. Mere curiosity is not yet differentiated from scientific thirst for knowledge; and a quaint apologue is as good a reward for the inquirer as the discovery of a law of nature. The numerous class which insists upon a joke being as unequivocal as a pistol-shot, and a serious statement as grave as a Blue-book, should therefore keep clear of Sir Thomas Browne. His most congenial readers are those who take a simple delight in following out any quaint train of reflections, careless whether it may culminate in a smile

or a sigh or in some thought in which the two elements of the sad and the ludicrous are inextricably blended. Sir Thomas, however, is in the "Inquiry" content generally with bringing out the strange curiosities of his museum, and does not care to draw any explicit moral. The quaintness of the objects unearthed seems to be a sufficient recompense for the labour of the search. Fortunately for his design, he lived in the time when a poet might have spoken without hyperbole of the "fairy tales of science." To us, who have to plod through an arid waste of painful observation, and slow piecing together of cautious inferences before reaching the promised land of wondrous discoveries, the expression sometimes appears to be ironical. Does not science, we may ask with a *primâ facie* resemblance of right, destroy as much poetry as it generates? To him no such doubts could present themselves, for fairyland was still a province of the empire of science. Strange beings moved through the pages of natural history, which were equally at home in the "Arabian Nights" or in poetical apologues. The griffin, the phœnix, and the dragon were not yet extinct; the salamander still sported in flames; and the basilisk slew men at a distance with his deadly glance. More commonplace animals indulged in the

habits which they had learnt in fables, and of which only some feeble vestiges now remain in the eloquence of strolling showmen. The elephant had no joints, and was caught by felling the tree against which he rested his stiff limbs in sleep; the pelican pierced its breast for the good of its young; ostriches were regularly painted with a horseshoe in their bills, to indicate their ordinary diet; storks refused to live except in republics and free states; the crowing of a cock put lions to flight, and men were struck dumb in good sober earnest by the sight of a wolf. The curiosity-hunter, in short, found his game still plentiful, and by a few excursions into Aristotle, Pliny, and other more recondite authors, was able still to display a rich bag for the edification of his readers. Sir Thomas Browne sets out on that quest with all imaginable seriousness. He persuaded himself, and he has persuaded some of his editors, that he was a genuine disciple of Bacon, by one of whose suggestions the "Inquiry" is supposed to have been prompted. Accordingly, as Bacon describes the idols by which the human mind is misled, Sir Thomas sets out with investigating the causes of error; but his introductory remarks immediately diverge into strange paths, from which it is obvious that the discovery of true scientific method

was a very subordinate object in his mind. Instead of telling us by what means truth is to be attained, his few perfunctory remarks on logic are lost in an historical narrative, given with infinite zest, of the earliest recorded blunders. The period of history in which he most delighted was the antediluvian—probably because it afforded the widest field for speculation. His books are full of references to the early days of the world. He takes a keen personal interest in our first parents. He discusses the unfortunate lapse of Adam and Eve from every possible point of view. It is not without a visible effort that he declines to settle which of the two was the more guilty, and what would have been the result if they had tasted the fruit of the Tree of Life before applying to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then he passes in review every recorded speech before the Flood, shows that in each of them, with one exception, there is a mixture of falsehood and error, and settles to his own satisfaction that Cain showed less "truth, wisdom, and reverence" than Satan under similar circumstances. Granting all which to be true, it is impossible to see how we are advanced in settling, for example, whether the Ptolemaic or the Copernican system of astronomy is to be adopted, or in extracting the grains of truth that may

be overlaid by masses of error in the writings of alchemists. Nor do we really learn much by being told that ancient authorities sometimes lie, for he evidently enjoys accumulating the fables, and cares little for showing how to discriminate their degree of veracity. He tells us, indeed, that Medea was simply a predecessor of certain modern artists, with an excellent "recipe to make white hair black;" and that Actæon was a spirited master of hounds, who, like too many of his ancestors, went metaphorically, instead of literally, to the dogs. He points out, moreover, that we must not believe on authority that the sea is the sweat of the earth, that the serpent, before the Fall, went erect like man, or that the right eye of a hedgehog, boiled in oil, and preserved in a brazen vessel, will enable us to see in the dark. Such stories, he moderately remarks, being "neither consonant unto reason nor correspondent unto experiment," are unto us "no axioms." But we may judge of his scepticism by his remarks on "Oppianus, that famous Cilician poet." Of this writer, he says that, "abating the annual mutation of sexes in the hyæna, the single sex of the rhinoceros, the antipathy between two drums of a lamb's and a wolf's skin, the informity of cubs, the venation of centaurs, and some few others, he may be read with delight and profit." Obviously, we shall find

in Sir Thomas Browne no inexorably severe guide to truth; he will not too sternly reject the amusing because it happens to be slightly improbable, or doubt an authority because he sometimes sanctions a mass of absurd fables. Satan, as he argues at great length, is at the bottom of most errors, from false religions down to a belief that there is another world in the moon; but Sir Thomas takes little trouble to provide us with an Ithuriel's spear; and, indeed, we have a faint suspicion that he will overlook at times the diabolic agency in sheer enthusiasm at the marvellous results. The logical design is little more than ostensible; and Sir Thomas, though he knew it not himself, is really satisfied with any line of inquiry that will bring him in sight of some freak of nature or of opinion suitable to his museum of curiosities.

Let us, however, pass from the anteroom, and enter this queer museum. We pause in sheer bewilderment on the threshold, and despair of classifying its contents intelligibly within any moderate space. This much, indeed, is obvious at first sight—that the title "vulgar errors" is to some extent a misnomer. It is not given to vulgar brains to go wrong by such complex methods. There are errors which require more learning and ingenuity than are necessary for discovering truths; and it is

in those queer freaks of philosophical minds that Sir Thomas specially delights. Though far, indeed, from objecting to any absurdity which lies on the common highroad, he rejoices in the true spirit of a collector when he can discover some grotesque fancy by rambling into less frequented paths of inquiry. Perhaps it will be best to take down one or two specimens, pretty much at random, and mark their nature and mode of treatment. Here, for example, is that quaint old wonder, the phœnix, "which, after many hundred years, burneth itself, and from the ashes thereof ariseth up another." Sir Thomas carefully discusses the pros and cons of this remarkable legend. In favour of the phœnix, it may be alleged that he is mentioned "not only by human authors," but also by such "holy writers." as Cyril, Epiphanius, and Ambrose.' Moreover, allusions are made to him in Job and the Psalms. "All which notwithstanding," the following grave reasons may be alleged against his existence: First, nobody has ever seen a phœnix. Secondly, those who mention him speak doubtfully, and even Pliny, after telling a story about a particular phœnix which came to Rome in the censorship of Claudius, unkindly turns round and declares the whole story to be a palpable lie. Thirdly, the name phœnix has been applied to many other birds, and those

who speak unequivocally of the genuine phœnix, contradict each other in the most flagrant way as to his age and habitat. Fourthly, many writers, such as Ovid, only speak poetically, and others, as Paracelsus, only mystically, whilst the remainder speak rhetorically, emblematically, or hieroglyphically. Fifthly, in the Scriptures, the word translated phœnix means a palm-tree. Sixthly, his existence, if we look closely, is implicitly denied in the Scriptures, because all fowls entered the ark in pairs, and animals were commanded to increase and multiply, neither of which statements are compatible with the solitary nature of the phœnix. Seventhly, nobody could have known by experience whether the phœnix actually lived for a thousand years, and, therefore, "there may be a mistake in the compute." Eighthly, and finally, no animals really spring, or could spring, from the ashes of their predecessors, and it is impossible to believe that they could enter the world in such a fashion. Having carefully summed up this negative evidence—enough, one would have fancied, to blow the poor phœnix into summary annihilation—Sir Thomas finally announces his grave conclusion in these words—"How far to rely on this tradition we refer unto consideration." And yet he feels impelled to add a quaint reflection on the improbability of a

statement made by Plutarch, that "the brain of a phœnix is a pleasant bit, but that it causeth the head-ache." Heliogabalus, he observes, could not have slain the phœnix, for it must of necessity be "a vain design to destroy any species, or mutilate the great accomplishment of six days." To which it is added, by way of final corollary, that after Cain had killed Abel, he could not have destroyed Eve, supposing her to have been the only woman in existence; for then there must have been another creation, and a second rib of Adam must have been animated.

We must not, however, linger too long with these singular speculations, for it is probable that phœnix-fanciers are becoming rare. It is enough to say briefly that if any one wishes to understand the natural history of the basilisk, the griffin, the salamander, the cockatrice, or the amphisbœna—if he wishes to know whether a chameleon lives on air, and an ostrich on horseshoes—whether a carbuncle gives light in the dark, whether the Glastonbury thorn bore flowers on Christmas-day, whether the mandrake "naturally groweth under gallowses," and shrieks "upon eradication,"—on these and many other such points he may find grave discussions in Sir Thomas Browne's pages. He lived in the period when it was still held to be a sufficient proof

of a story that it was written in a book, especially if the book were Latin; and some persons, such as Alexander Ross, whose memory is preserved only by the rhyme in "Hudibras," argued gravely against his scepticism.* For Sir Thomas, in spite of his strange excursions into the marvellous, inclines for the most part to the sceptical side of the question. He was not insensible to the growing influence of the scientific spirit, though he believed implicitly in witchcraft, spoke with high respect of alchemy and astrology, and refused to believe that the earth went round the sun. He feels that his favourite creatures are doomed to extinction, and though dealing lovingly with them, speaks rather like an attached mourner at their funerals than a physician endeavouring to maintain their flickering vitality. He tries experiments and has a taste for dissection. He proves by the evidence of his senses, and believes them in spite of the general report, that a dead kingfisher will not turn its breast to the wind. He convinced himself that if two magnetic needles were placed in the centre of rings marked with the alphabet (an odd anticipation of the electric telegraph,

* Ross, for example, urges that the invisibility of the phœnix is sufficiently accounted for by the natural desire of a unique animal to keep out of harm's way.

minus the wires), they would not point to the same letter by an occult sympathy. His arguments are often to the point, though overlaid with a strange accretion of the fabulous. In discussing the question of the blackness of negroes, he may remind benevolent readers of some of Mr Darwin's recent speculations. He rejects, and on the same grounds which Mr Darwin declares to be conclusive, the hypothesis that the blackness is the immediate effect of the climate; and he points out, what is important in regard to "sexual selection," that a negro may admire a flat nose as we admire an aquiline; though, of course, he diverges into extra-scientific questions when discussing the probable effects of the curse of Ham, and rather loses himself in a "digression concerning blackness." We may fancy that this problem pleased Sir Thomas rather because it appeared to be totally insoluble than for any other reason; and in spite of his occasional gleams of scientific observation, he is always most at home when on the border-land which divides the purely marvellous from the region of ascertainable fact. In the last half of his book, indeed, having exhausted natural history, he plunges with intense delight into questions which bear the same relation to genuine antiquarianism that his phœnixes and salamanders

bear to scientific inquiry: whether the sun was created in Libra; what was the season of the year in Paradise; whether the forbidden fruit was an apple; whether Methuselah was the longest-lived of all men (a main argument on the other side being that Adam was created at the perfect age of man, which in those days was fifty or sixty, and thus had a right to add sixty to his natural years); what was the nature of St John the Baptist's camel's-hair garment; what were the secret motives of the builders of the tower of Babel; whether the three kings really lived at Cologne, —these and many other profound inquiries are detailed with all imaginable gravity, and the interest of the inquirer is not the less because he generally comes to the satisfactory and sensible conclusion that we cannot possibly know anything whatever about it.

The "Inquiry into Vulgar Errors" was published in 1646, and Sir Thomas's next publication appeared in 1658. The dates are significant. Whilst all England was in the throes of the first civil war, Sir Thomas had been calmly finishing his catalogue of intellectual oddities. This book was published soon after the crushing victory of Naseby. King, Parliament, and Army, illustrating a very different kind of vulgar error, continued to fight out their quarrel: the

death. Whilst Milton, whose genius was in some way most nearly akin to his own, was raising his voice in favour of the liberty of the press, good Sir Thomas was meditating profoundly on quincunxes. Milton hurled fierce attacks at Salmasius, and meanwhile Sir Thomas, in his quiet country town, was discoursing on "certain sepulchral urns lately found in Norfolk." In the year of Cromwell's death, the result of his labours appeared in a volume containing "The Garden of Cyrus" and the "Hydriotaphia."

The first of these essays illustrates Sir Thomas's peculiar mysticism. The external world was not to him the embodiment of invariable forces, and therefore capable of revealing a general law in a special instance; but rather a system of symbols, signatures of the Plastic Nature, to which mysterious truths were arbitrarily annexed. A Pythagorean doctrine of numbers was therefore congenial to his mind. He ransacks heaven and earth, he turns over all his stores of botanical knowledge, he searches all sacred and profane literature to discover anything that is in the form of an X, or that reminds him in any way of the number 5. From the garden of Cyrus, where the trees were arranged in this order, he rambles through the universe, stumbling over quincunxes at every step. To

take, for example, his final, and, of course, his fifth chapter, we find him modestly disavowing an "inexcusable Pythagorism," and yet unable to refrain from telling us that five was anciently called the number of justice; that it was also called the divisive number; that most flowers have five leaves; that feet have five toes; that the cone has a "quintuple division;" that there were five wise and five foolish virgins; that the "most generative animals" were created on the fifth day; that the cabalists discovered strange meanings in the number five; that there were five golden mice; that five thousand persons were fed with five barley-loaves; that the ancients mixed five parts of water with wine; that plays have five acts; that starfish have five points; and that if any one inquire into the causes of this strange repetition, "he shall not pass his hours in vulgar speculations." We, however, must decline the task, and will content ourselves with a few characteristic phrases from his peroration. "The quincunx of heaven," he says, referring to the *Hyades*, "runs low, and 'tis time to close the five parts of knowledge. We are unwilling to spin out our awaking thoughts into the phantasms of sleep, which often continueth precogitations, making cables of cobwebs, and wildernesses of handsome groves. . . . Night, which Pagan

theology could make the daughter of chaos, affords no advantage to the description of order; although no lower than that mass can we derive its genealogy. All things began in order, so shall they end, and so shall they begin again; according to the admirer of order and mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven. Although Somnus, in Homer, be sent to rouse up Agamemnon, I find no such effects in these drowsy approaches of night. To keep our eyes open longer were but to act with our Antipodes. The huntsmen are up in America, and they are already past their first sleep in Persia. But who can be drowsy at that hour, which roused us from everlasting sleep? Or have slumbering thoughts at that hour, when sleep itself must end, and, as some conjecture, all shall awake again?"

"Think you," asks Coleridge, commenting upon this passage, "'that there ever was such a reason given for going to bed at midnight, to wit, that if we did not, we should be acting the part of our Antipodes?" In truth, Sir Thomas finishes his most whimsical work whimsically enough. The passage is a good specimen of the quaint and humorous eloquence in which he most delights—snatching fine thought from sheer absurdities, and putting the homeliest truth into a dress of amusing oddity. It may remind us that it is time

to touch upon those higher qualities, which have led one of the acutest of recent critics * to call him "our most imaginative mind since Shakspeare." Everywhere, indeed, his imaginative writing is, if we may so speak, shot with his peculiar humour. It is difficult to select any eloquent passage which does not show this characteristic interweaving of the two elements. Throw the light from one side, and it shows nothing but quaint conceits; from the other, and we have a rich glow of poetic colouring. His humour and his melancholy are inextricably blended; and his melancholy itself is described to a nicety in the words of Jaques:—"It is a melancholy of his own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of his travels, in which his often rumination wraps him in a most humorous sadness." That most marvellous Jaques, indeed, is rather too much of a cynic, and shows none of the religious sentiment of Sir Thomas Browne; but if they could have talked together in the forest, poor Jaques would have excited a far closer sympathy than he receives from his very unappreciative companions. The book in which this "humorous sadness" finds

* Mr Lowell, in "Shakspeare Once More," "Among My Books."

the fullest expression is the "Religio Medici." The conception of the book apparently resulted from the "sundry contemplation of his travels," and it is written throughout in his characteristic strain of thought. From his travels he had learnt the best lesson of a lofty toleration. The furious controversies of that age, in which the stake, the prison, and the pillory were the popular theological arguments, produced a characteristic effect on his sympathies. He did not give in to the established belief, like his kindly-natured contemporary Fuller, who remarks, in a book published about the same time with the "Religio Medici," that even "the mildest authors" agree in the propriety of putting certain heretics to death. Nor, on the other hand, does he share the glowing indignation which prompted the great protests of Chillingworth and Taylor against the cruelties practised in the name of religion. Browne has a method of his own in view of such questions. He shrinks from the hard, practical world into spiritual meditation. He regards all opinions less as a philosopher than as a poet. He asks, not whether a dogma is true, but whether it is imposing or quaint. If his imagination or his fancy can take pleasure in contemplating it, he is not curious to investigate its scientific accuracy. And therefore he catches the poetical side of creeds

which differ from his own, and cannot even understand why anybody should grow savage over their shortcomings. He never could be angry with a man's judgment "for not agreeing with me in that from which, perhaps, within a few days, I should dissent myself." Travelling in this spirit through countries where the old faith still prevailed, he felt a lively sympathy for the Catholic modes of worship. Holy water and crucifixes do not offend him. He is willing to enter the churches and to pray with the worshippers of other persuasions. He is naturally inclined, he says, "to that which misguided zeal terms superstition," and would show his respect rather than his unbelief. In an eloquent passage, which might teach a lesson to some modern tourists, he remarks:—"At the sight of a cross or crucifix I can dispense with my hat, but scarce with the thought and memory of my Saviour. I cannot laugh at, but rather pity, the fruitless journeys of pilgrims, or contemn the miserable condition of friars; for though misplaced in circumstances, there is something in it of devotion. I could never hear the Ave Mary bell without an elevation; or think it a sufficient warrant, because they erred in one circumstance, for me to err in all—that is, in silence and dumb contempt. Whilst, therefore, they directed their devotions to her, I offered mine to God,

and rectified the errors of their prayers by rightly ordering my own. At a solemn procession I have wept abundantly, while my consorts, blind with opposition and prejudice, have fallen into an excess of laughter and scorn."

Very characteristic, from this point of view, are the heresies into which he confesses that he has sometimes fallen. Setting aside one purely fantastical theory, they all imply a desire for toleration even in the next world. He doubted whether the damned would not ultimately be released from torture. He felt great difficulty in giving up prayers for the dead, and thought that to be the object of such prayers, was "a good way to be remembered by posterity, and far more noble than a history." These heresies, he says, as he never tried to propagate them, or to dispute over them, "without additions of new fuel, went out insensibly of themselves." Yet he still retained, in spite of its supposed heterodoxy, some hope for the fate of virtuous heathens. "Amongst so many subdivisions of hell," he says, "there might have been one limbo left for these." With a most characteristic turn, he softens the horror of the reflection, by giving it an almost humorous aspect. "What a strange vision will it be," he exclaims, "to see their poetical fictions

converted into verities, and their imagined and fancied furies into real devils! How strange to them will sound the history of Adam, when they shall suffer for him they never heard of!"

The words may remind us of an often-quoted passage from Tertullian; but the Father seems to gloat over the appalling doctrines, from which the philosophical humorist shrinks, even though their very horror has a certain strange fascination for his fancy. Heresies such as these will not be harshly condemned at the present day. From others of a different kind, Sir Thomas is shielded by his natural love of the marvellous. He loves to abandon his thoughts to mysterious contemplations; he even considers it a subject for complaint, that there are "not impossibilities enough in religion for an active faith." "I love," he says, "to lose myself in a mystery; to pursue my reason to an *O altitudo!* 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involved enigmas and riddles of the Trinity, incarnation, and resurrection. I can answer all the objections of Satan and my rebellious reason with that odd resolution I learnt of Tertullian, *certum est quia impossibile est.*" He rejoices that he was not an Israelite at the passage of the Red Sea, or an early Christian in the days of miracles; for

then his faith, supported by his senses, would have had less merit. He loves to puzzle and confound his understanding with the thoughts that pass the limits of our intellectual powers: he rejoices in contemplating eternity, because nobody can "speak of it without a solecism," and to plunge his imagination into the abysses of the infinite. "When I cannot satisfy my reason," he says, "I love to recreate my fancy." He recreates it by soaring into the regions where the most daring metaphysical logic breaks down beneath us, and delights in exposing his reason to the rude test of believing both sides of a contradiction. Here, as everywhere, the strangest freaks of fancy intrude themselves into his sublime contemplations. A mystic, when abasing reason in the presence of faith, may lose sight of earthly objects in the splendour of the beatific vision. But Sir Thomas, even when he enters the holiest shrine, never quite loses his grasp of the grotesque. Wonder, whether produced by the sublime or the simply curious, has equal attraction for him. His mind is distracted between the loftiest mysteries of Christianity, and the strangest conceits of Talmudists or schoolmen. Thus, for example, whilst eloquently descanting on the submissiveness of his reason, he informs us (obviously claiming credit for the sacrifice

of his curiosity) that he can read of the raising of Lazarus, and yet refrain from raising a "law case, whether his heir might lawfully detain his inheritance bequeathed unto him by his death, and he, though restored to life, have no plea or title unto his former possessions." Or we might take the inverse transition, from the absurd to the sublime, in his meditations upon hell. He begins by inquiring whether the everlasting fire is the same with that of our earth. "Some of our chymicks," it appears, "facetiously affirm that, at the last fire, all shall be crystallised and reverberated into glass," but, after playing for some time with this and other strange fancies, he says in a loftier strain, though still with his odd touch of humour,—"Men speak too popularly who place it in those flaming mountains, which, to grosser apprehensions, represent hell. The heart of men is the place the devils dwell in. I feel sometimes a hell within myself; Lucifer keeps his courts in my breast; Legion is revived in me. There was more than one hell in Magdalene, when there were seven devils; for every devil is a hell unto himself; he holds enough of torture in his own *ubi*, and needs not the misery of circumference to afflict him; and thus a distracted conscience here is a shadow or introduction into hell hereafter."

Sir Thomas's witticisms are like the grotesque carvings in a Gothic cathedral. It is plain that in his mind they have not the slightest tinge of conscious irreverence. They are simply his natural mode of expression; forbid him to be humorous, and you might as well forbid him to speak at all. If the severity of our modern taste is shocked at an intermixture, which seemed natural enough to his contemporaries, we may find an unconscious apology in a singularly fine passage of the "Religio Medici." Justifying his love of church music, he says,—"Even that vulgar and tavern music, which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the first composer." That power of extracting deep devotion from "vulgar tavern music" is the great secret of Browne's eloquence. It is not wonderful, perhaps, that, with our associations, the performance seems of questionable taste; and that some strains of tavern music mix unpleasantly in the grander harmonies which they suggest. Few people find their religious emotions stimulated by the performance of a nigger melody, and they have some difficulty in keeping pace with a mind which springs in happy unconsciousness, or rather in keen enjoyment, of the contrast from the queer or commonplace to the most exalted objects of human thought.

One other peculiarity shows itself chiefly in the last pages of the "Religio Medici." His worthy commentators have laboured to defend Sir Thomas from the charge of vanity. He expatiates upon his universal charity; upon his inability to regard even vice as a fitting object for satire; upon his warm affection to his friend, whom he already loves better than himself, and whom, yet in a few months, he will regard with a love which will make his present feelings seem indifference; upon his absolute want of avarice or any kind of meanness; and, which certainly seems a little odd in the midst of these self-laudations, upon his freedom from the "first and father sin, not only of man but of the devil, pride." Good Dr Watts was shocked at this "arrogant temerity," and Dr Johnson appears rather to concur in the charge. And certainly, if we are to interpret his language in a matter-of-fact spirit, it must be admitted that a gentleman who openly claims for himself the virtues of charity, generosity, courage, and modesty, might be not unfairly accused of vanity. To no one, as we have already remarked, is such a matter-of-fact criticism less applicable. If a humorist was to be denied the right of saying with a serious face what he does not quite think, we should make strange work of some

of the most charming books in the world. The Sir Thomas Browne of the "Religio Medici" is by no means to be identified with the everyday flesh-and-blood physician of Norwich. He is the ideal and glorified Sir Thomas, and represents rather what ought to have been than what was. We all have such doubles who visit us in our day-dreams, and sometimes cheat us into the belief that they are our real selves, but most of us luckily hide the very existence of such phantoms; for few of us, indeed, could make them agreeable to our neighbours. And yet the apology is scarcely needed. Bating some few touches, Sir Thomas seems to have claimed little that he did not really possess. And if he was a little vain, why should we be angry? Vanity is only offensive when it is sullen or exacting. When it merely amounts to an unaffected pleasure in dwelling on the peculiarities of a man's own character, it is rather an agreeable literary ingredient. Sir Thomas defines his point of view with his usual felicity. "The world that I regard," he says in the spirit of the imprisoned Richard II., "is myself: it is the microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other, I use it but like my globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation." That whimsical inversion of the natural order is the key to the "Religio

Medici." We, for the nonce, are to regard Sir Thomas Browne as a world, and to study the marvels of his microcosm instead of the outside wonders. And no one can deny that it is a good and kindly world—a world full of the strangest combinations, where even the most sacred are allied with the oddest objects. Yet his imagination everywhere diffuses a solemn light such as that which falls through painted windows, and which somehow harmonises the whole quaint assemblage of images. The sacred is made more interesting instead of being degraded by its association with the quaint; and on the whole, after a stay in this microcosm, we feel better, calmer, more tolerant, and a good deal more amused than when we entered it.

Passing from the portrait to the original, we may recognise, or fancy that we recognise, the same general features. Sir Thomas assures us that his life, up to the period of the "Religio Medici," was a "miracle of thirty years, which to relate were not a history, but a piece of poetry, and would sound to common ears like a fable." Johnson, with his usual sense, observes that it is rather difficult to detect the miraculous element in any part of the story open to our observation. "Surely," he says, "a man may visit France and Italy, reside at Montpelier and Padua, and at last take his degree at Leyden, with-

out anything miraculous." And although Southey endeavours to maintain that the miracle consisted in Browne's preservation from infidelity, it must be admitted that to the ordinary mind that result seems explicable by natural causes. We must be content with Johnson's explanation, that, in some sense, "all life is miraculous;" and, in short, that the strangeness consists rather in Browne's view of his own history, than in any unusual phenomena. Certainly, no man seems on the whole to have slipped down the stream of life more smoothly. After his travels he settled quietly at Norwich, and there passed forty-five years of scarcely interrupted prosperity. In the "Religio Medici" he indulges in some disparaging remarks upon marriage. "The whole world," he says, "was made for man; but the twelfth part of man for woman. Man is the whole world and the breath of God; woman the rib and crooked part of man." He wishes, after the fashion of Montaigne, that we might grow like the trees, and avoid this foolish and trivial ceremony; and therefore—for such inferences are perfectly legitimate in the history of a humorist—he married a lady, of whom it is said that she was so perfect that "they seemed to come together by a kind of natural magnetism," had ten children, and lived very happily ever afterwards. It is not difficult,

from the fragmentary notices that have been left to us, to put together some picture of his personal appearance. He was a man of dignified appearance, with a striking resemblance, as Southey has remarked, to Charles I., "always cheerful, but never merry," given to unseasonable blushing, little inclined to talk, but strikingly original when once launched in conversation; sedate in his dress, and obeying some queer medical crotchets as to its proper arrangement; always at work in the intervals of his "drudging practice;" and generally a sober and dignified physician. From some letters which have been preserved we catch a view of his social demeanour. He was evidently an affectionate and liberal father, with good old orthodox views of the wide extent of the paternal prerogative. One of his sons was a promising naval officer, and sends home from beyond the seas accounts of such curiosities as were likely to please the insatiable curiosity of his parent. In his answers, the good Sir Thomas quotes Aristotle's definition of fortitude for the benefit of his gallant lieutenant, and argues elaborately to dissuade him from a practice which he believes to prevail in "the king's shipps, when, in desperate cases, they blow up the same." He proves by most excellent reasons, and by the authority of Plutarch, that such self-immola-

tion is an unnecessary strain of gallantry; yet somehow we feel rather glad that Sir Thomas could not be a witness to the reception of this sensible, but perhaps rather superfluous advice, in the messroom of the "Marie Rose." It is more pleasant to observe the carefulness with which he has treasured up and repeats all the compliments to the lieutenant's valour and wisdom which have reached him from trustworthy sources. This son appears to have died at a comparatively early age; but with the elder son, Edward—who, like his father, travelled in various parts of Europe, and then became a distinguished physician—he maintained a long correspondence, full of those curious details in which his soul delighted. His son, for example, writes from Prague that "in the mines at Brunswick is reported to be a spirit; and another at the tin mine at Stackenwald, in the shape of a monke, which strikes the miners, playeth on the bagpipe, and many such tricks." They correspond, however, on more legitimate inquiries, and especially on the points to be noticed in the son's medical lectures. Sir Thomas takes a keen interest in the fate of an unlucky "oestridge" which found its way to London in 1681, and was doomed to illustrate some of the vulgar errors. The poor bird was induced to swallow a piece of iron weighing two and a half ounces,

which, strange to say, it could not digest. It soon afterwards died "of a soden," either from the severity of the weather or from the peculiar nature of its diet.

In one well-known case Sir Thomas's peculiar theories received a more unfortunate application. He contributed by his evidence to the death of the witches tried by Hale in 1664; and one could wish that in this case his love of the wonderful had been more checked by his sense of humour.

The fact that he was knighted by Charles II. in 1671 is now memorable only for Johnson's characteristic remark. The lexicographer's love of truth and loyalty to his pet monarch struggle with each other in the equivocal compliment to Charles's virtue in rewarding excellence "with such honorary distinctions at least as cost him nothing." The good doctor died in 1682, in the seventy-seventh year of his age, and met his end, as we are assured, in the spirit of his own writings. "There is," he admirably says, "but one comfort left, that, though it be in the power of the weakest arm to take away life, it is not in the strongest to deprive us of death." Most men, for one reason or another, have at times been "half in love with easeful death." Sir Thomas gives his view more fully in another passage, in which he says, with his usual quaint and eloquent

melancholy, "When I take a full view and circle of myself, without this reasonable moderator and equal piece of justice, death, I do conceive myself the miserablest person extant. Were there not another life that I hope for, all the vanities of this world should not entreat a moment's breath from me. Could the devil work my belief to imagine I could never die, I could not outlive that very thought. I have so abject a conceit of this common way of existence, this retaining to the sun and elements, I cannot think this to be a man, or to have according to the dignity of humanity. In expectation of a better, I can with patience embrace this life, yet, in my best meditations, do often defy death."

What, after all, one is inclined to ask, is the secret of the strange charm of Sir Thomas's style? Will you be kind enough to give us the old doctor's literary prescription, that we may produce the same effects at will? In what proportions shall we mingle humour, imagination, and learning? How are we to select the language which will be the fittest vehicle for the thought? or rather, for the metaphor is a little too mechanical, what were the magic spells with which he sways our imaginative moods? Like other spells, we must reply, it is incommunicable; no real answer can be given even by critics who, like Cole-

ridge and De Quincey, show something of the same power. Coarser observers can only point to such external peculiarities as the Latinisms in which he indulges even more freely than most of his contemporaries. To Johnson they seemed "pedantic;" to most modern readers they have an old-world charm; but in any case, we know little more of Sir Thomas when we have observed that he is capable of using for "hanging" the periphrasis "illaqueation or pendulous suffocation." The perusal of a page will make us recognise what could not be explained in a whole volume of analysis. One may, however, hazard a remark upon the special mood which is clothed or incarnated in his stately rhetoric. The imagination of Sir Thomas, of course, shows the generic qualities, roughly described as Northern, Gothic, Teutonic, or romantic. He writes about tombs, and all Englishmen, as M. Taine tells us, like to write about tombs. When we try to find the specific differences which distinguish it from other imaginations of similar quality, we should be inclined to define him as belonging to a very rare intellectual family. He is a mystic with a sense of humour, or rather, his habitual mood is determined by an attraction towards the two opposite poles of humour and mysticism. He concludes two of his treatises (the "Christian Morals" and

"Urn Burial") in words expressive of one of these tendencies: "If any have been so happy as personally to understand Christian annihilation, ecstasy, exolution, transformation, the kiss of the spouse, and ingression into the divine shadow according to mystical theology, they have already had an handsome anticipation of heaven; the world is in a manner over, and the earth in ashes unto them." Many of Sir Thomas's reflections, his love in spiritualising external emblems, as, for example, in the reflections on the quincunx, and the almost sensuous delight in the contemplation of a mystery, show the same bent. The fully-developed mystic loses sight of the world and its practical duties in the rapture of formless meditations; facts become shadows, and emotions the only realities. But the presence of a mystical element is the mark of all lofty imaginations. The greatest poet is he who feels most deeply and habitually that our "little lives are rounded with a sleep;" that we are but atoms in the boundless abysses of space and time; that the phenomenal world is but a transitory veil, to be valued only as its contemplation arouses or disciplines our deepest emotions. Capacity for passing from the finite to the infinite, for interpreting the high instincts before which our mortal nature

"Doth tremble like a guilty thing surprised,"

is the greatest endowment of the Shakespeares and Dantes. Mysticism proper is the abuse of this tendency, which prompts to the impossible feat of soaring altogether beyond the necessary base of concrete realities. The mystic temperament is balanced in some great men, as in Shakespeare, by their intense interest in human passion; in others, as in Wordsworth, by their profound sense of the primary importance of the moral law; and in others, as in Jeremy Taylor, by their hold upon the concrete imagery of a traditionary theology; whilst to some, the mystic vision is strangely blended with an acceptance of the epicurean precept, Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Sir Thomas Browne seems to be held back from abandoning himself to the ecstasies of abstract meditation, chiefly by his peculiar sense of humour. There is a closer connection than we are always willing to admit between humour and profanity. Humour is the faculty which always keeps us in mind of the absurdity which is the shadow of sublimity. It is naturally allied to intellectual scepticism, as in Rabelais or Montaigne; and Sir Thomas shared the tendency sufficiently to be called atheist by some wiseacres. But his humour was too gentle to suggest scepticism of the aggressive kind. It is almost too free from cynicism. He cannot adopt any dogma unreservedly,

but neither does any dogma repel him. He revels in the mental attitude of hopeless perplexity, which is simply unendurable to the commonplace and matter-of-fact intellects. He likes to be balanced between opposing difficulties; to play with any symbol of worship without actually worshipping it; to prostrate himself sincerely at many shrines, and yet with a half smile on his lips. He cannot be a rhetorician in the ordinary sense of the word; he would have been hopelessly out of place on the floor of a senate, stirring men's patriotism or sense of right; for half his sympathy would always be with the Opposition. He could not have moved the tears or the devotional ecstasies of a congregation, for he has too vivid a sense that any and every dogma is but one side of an inevitable antinomy. Strong convictions are needed for the ordinary controversial successes, and his favourite point of view is the centre from which all convictions radiate and all look equally probable. But then instead of mocking at all, he sympathises with all, and expresses the one sentiment, which may be extracted from their collision—the sentiment of reverence blended with scepticism. It is a contradictory sentiment, one may say, in a sense, but the essence of humour is to be contradictory. The language in which he utters himself

was determined by his omnivorous appetite for every quaint or significant symbol to be discovered in the whole field of learning. With no prejudices, nothing comes amiss to him; and the signature of some mysterious principle may be found in every object of art or nature. Science in its infancy was still half mystic, and the facts which he gathered were all tinged with the semi-mythical fancies of the earliest explorers of the secrets of nature. In an old relic, recalling "the dreams and tramplings of three conquests," in a queer annual, or an ancient fragment of history might be the appropriate emblem, or something more than the emblem of a truth equally impressive to the scientific and the poetical imagination. He would have been happy by the midnight lamp in Milton's "high lonely tower;" but his humour would look at the romances which Milton loved rather with the eyes of Cervantes than of Milton. Their tone of sentiment would be too strained and highflown; and he would prefer to read of the spirits that are found

> "In fire, air, flood, or underground,"

or to try to penetrate the secret of

> "Every star that heaven doth show,
> And every herb that sips the dew,"

by reading all the nonsense that had been written about them in the dawn of inquiry. He should be read in a corresponding spirit. One should often stop to appreciate the full flavour of some quaint allusion, or lay down the book to follow out some diverging line of thought. So read in a retired study, or beneath the dusty shelves of an ancient library, a page of Sir Thomas seems to revive the echoes as of ancient chants in college chapels, strangely blended with the sonorous perorations of professors in the neighbouring schools, so that the interferences sometimes produce a note of gentle mockery and sometimes heighten solemnity by quaintness.

That, however, is not the spirit in which books are often read in these days. We have an appetite for useful information, and an appetite for frivolous sentiment or purely poetical musing. We cannot combine the two after the quaint fashion of the old physician. And therefore these charming writings have ceased to suit our modern taste; and Sir Thomas is already passing under that shadow of mortality which obscures all, even the greatest, reputations, and with which no one has dealt more pathetically or graphically than himself.

If we are disposed to complain, Sir Thomas shall himself supply the answer, in a passage from the "Hydriotaphia," which, though described by Hallam as the best written of his treatises, is not to my taste so attractive as the "Religio Medici." The concluding chapter, however, is in his best style, and here are some of his reflections on posthumous fame. The end of the world, he says, is approaching, and "Charles V. can never hope to live within two Methuselahs of Hector." "And, therefore, restless inquietude for the diuturnity of our memories with present considerations seems a vanity out of date, and a superannuated piece of folly. We cannot hope to live as long in our names, as some have done in their persons. One face of Janus holds no proportion to the other. 'Tis too late to be ambitious. The great mutations of the world are acted, or time may be too short for our designs. To extend our memories by monuments, whose death we daily pray for, and whose duration we cannot hope without injury to our expectations in the advent of the last day, were a contradiction to our beliefs. We, whose generations are ordained in this setting part of time, are providentially taken off from such imaginations; and being necessitated to eye the remaining particle of

futurity, are naturally constituted into thoughts of the next world, and cannot excusably decline the consideration of that duration, which maketh pyramids pillars of snow, and all that's past a moment."

If the argument has now been vulgarised in the hands of Dr Cumming and his like, the language and the sentiment are worthy of any of our greatest masters.

II.

*JONATHAN EDWARDS.**

Two of the ablest thinkers whom America has yet produced were born in New England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The theorists who would trace all our characteristics to inheritance from some remote ancestor might see in Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin normal representatives of the two types from which the genuine Yankee is derived. Though blended in various proportions, and though one may exist almost to the exclusion of the other, an element of shrewd mother-wit and an element of transcendental enthusiasm are to be detected in all who boast a descent from the Pilgrim Fathers. Franklin, born in 1706, represents in its fullest development the more earthly side of this compound. A thoroughbred utilitarian, full of sagacity, and carry-

* The Works of President Edwards. Worcester (Mass.), 1808.

ing into all regions of thought that strange ingenuity which makes an American the handiest of all human beings, Franklin is best embodied in his own Poor Richard. Honesty is the best policy: many a little makes a mickle: the second vice is lying, the first is running in debt; and—

> "Get what you can, and what you get hold;
> 'Tis the stone that will turn all your lead into gold."

These and a string of similar maxims are the pith of Franklin's message to the world. Franklin, however, was not merely a man in whom the practical intelligence was developed in a very remarkable degree, but was fortunate in coming upon a crisis admirably suited to his abilities, and in being generally in harmony with the spirit of his age. He succeeded, as we know, in snatching lightning from the heavens, and the sceptre from tyrants; and had his reward in the shape of much contemporary homage from French philosophers, and lasting renown amongst his countrymen. Meanwhile, Jonathan Edwards, his senior by three years, had the fate common to men who are unfitted for the struggles of daily life, and whose philosophy does not harmonise with the dominant current of the time. A speculative recluse, with little faculty of literary expression, and

given to utter opinions shocking to the popular mind, he excited little attention during his lifetime, except amongst the sharers of his own religious persuasions; and, when noticed after his death, the praise of his intellectual acuteness has generally been accompanied with an expression of abhorrence for his supposed moral obtuseness. Mr Lecky, for example, whilst speaking of Edwards as "probably the ablest defender of Calvinism," mentions his treatise on Original Sin as "one of the most revolting books that have ever proceeded from the pen of man" (Rationalism, i. 404). That intense dislike, which is far from uncommon, for severe reasoning has even made a kind of reproach to Edwards of what is called his "inexorable logic." To condemn a man for being honestly in the wrong is generally admitted to be unreasonable; but people are even more unforgiving to the sin of being honestly in the right. The frankness with which Edwards avowed opinions, not by any means peculiar to himself, has left a certain stain upon his reputation. He has also suffered in general repute from a cause which should really increase our interest in his writings. Metaphysicians, whilst admiring his acuteness, have been disgusted by his adherence to an outworn theology; and theologians have cared little for a man who was

primarily a philosophical speculator, and has used his philosophy to bring into painful relief the most terrible dogmas of the ancient creeds. Edwards, however, is interesting just because he is a connecting link between two widely different phases of thought. He connects the expiring Calvinism of the old Puritan theocracy with what is called the transcendentalism embodied in the writings of Emerson and other leaders of young America. He is remarkable, too, as illustrating at the central point of the eighteenth century those speculative tendencies which were most vitally opposed to the then dominant philosophy of Locke and Hume. And, finally, there is a still more permanent interest in the man himself, as exhibiting in high relief the weak and the strong points of the teaching of which Calvinism represents only one embodiment. His life, in striking contrast to that of his more celebrated contemporary, ran its course far away from the main elements of European activity. With the exception of a brief stay at New York, he lived almost exclusively in the interior of what was then the thinly-settled colony of Massachusetts.* His

* The population of Massachusetts is stated at 164,000 inhabitants in 1742, and 240,000 in 1761.—See Holmes' Annals.

father was for nearly sixty years minister of a church in Connecticut, and his mother's father, the "celebrated Solomon Stoddard," for about an equal time minister of a church at Northampton, Massachusetts. Young Jonathan, brought up at the feet of these venerable men, after the strictest sect of the Puritans, was sent to Yale at the age of twelve, took his B.A. degree at the age of seventeen, and two years afterwards became a preacher at New York. Thence he returned to a tutorship at Yale, but in his twenty-fourth year was ordained as colleague of his grandfather Stoddard, and spent at Northampton the next twenty-three years of his life. It may be added that he married early a wife of congenial temper, and had eleven children.* One of his daughters,—it is an odd combination,—was the mother of Aaron Burr, the duellist who killed Hamilton, and afterwards became the prototype of all Southern secessionists. The external facts, however, of Edwards' life are of little interest, except as indicating the influences to which he was

* These early New England patriarchs were blessed with abundant families. Edwards' father had eleven children, his paternal grandfather thirteen, and his maternal grandfather had twelve children by a lady who had already three children by a previous marriage.

exposed. Puritanism, though growing faint, was still powerful in New England; it was bred in his bones, and he was drilled from his earliest years into its sternest dogmas. Some curious fragments of his early life and letters indicate the nature of his spiritual development. Whilst still almost a boy, he writes down solemn resolutions, and practises himself in severe self-inspection. He resolves "never to do, be, or suffer anything in soul or body, more or less, but what tends to the glory of God;" to "live with all my might while I do live;" "never to speak anything that is ridiculous or matter of laughter on the Lord's Day" (a resolution which we might think rather superfluous, even though extended to other days); and, "frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God, which was made at my baptism, which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church, and which I have solemnly ratified this 12th day of January 1723" (i. 18). He pledges himself, in short, to a life of strict self-examination and absolute devotion to what he takes for the will of God. Similar resolutions have doubtless been made by countless young men, brought up under the same conditions, and diaries of equal value have been published by the authors of innumerable saintly biographies.

In Edwards' mouth, however, they really had a meaning, and bore corresponding results. An interesting paper gives an account of those religious "experiences" to which his sect attaches so tremendous an importance. From his childhood, he tells us, his mind had been full of objections to the doctrine of God's sovereignty. It appeared to him to be a "horrible doctrine" that God should choose whom He would, and reject whom He pleased, "leaving them eternally to perish and be tormented eternally in hell." The whole history of his intellectual development is involved in the process by which he became gradually reconciled to this appalling dogma. In the second year of his collegiate course, we are told, which would be about the fourteenth of his age, he read Locke's Essay with inexpressible delight. The first glimpse of metaphysical inquiry, it would seem, revealed to him the natural bent of his mind, and opened to him the path of speculation in which he ever afterwards delighted. Locke, though Edwards always mentions him with deep respect, was indeed a thinker of a very different school. The disciple owed to his master, not a body of doctrine, but the impulse to intellectual activity. He succeeded in working out for himself a satisfactory answer to the problem by which he had been perplexed. His cavils

ceased as his reason strengthened. "God's absolute sovereignty and justice" seemed to him to be as clear as anything he saw with his eyes; "at least," he adds, "it is so at times." Nay, he even came to rejoice in the doctrine and regard it as "infinitely pleasant, bright, and sweet" (i. 33). The Puritan assumptions were so ingrained in his nature that the agony of mind which they caused never led him to question their truth, though it animated him to discover a means of reconciling them to reason; and the reconciliation is the whole burden of his ablest works. The effect upon his mind is described in terms which savour of a less stern school of faith. God's glory was revealed to him throughout the whole creation, and often threw him into ecstasies of devotion (i. 33). "God's excellency, His wisdom, His purity, and love seemed to appear in everything: in the sun, moon, and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, and trees; in the water and all nature, which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon for continuance, and in the day spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things; in the meantime singing forth, with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer." Thunder, he adds, had once been terrible

to him; "now scarce anything in all the works of nature" was so sweet (i. 36). It seemed as if the "majestic and awful voice of God's thunder" was in fact the voice of its Creator. Thunder and lightning, we know, suggested characteristically different contemplations to Franklin. Edwards' utterances are as remarkable for their amiability as for their non-scientific character. We see in him the gentle mystic rather than the stern divine who consigned helpless infants to eternal torture without a question of the goodness of their Creator. This vein of meditation, however, continued to be familiar to him. He spent most of his time reflecting on Divine things, and often walking in solitary places and woods to enjoy uninterrupted soliloquies and converse with God. At New York he often retired to a quiet spot—now, one presumes, seldom used for such purposes—on the banks of the Hudson river, to abandon himself to his quiet reveries, or to "converse on the things of God" with one Mr John Smith. To the end of his life he indulged in the same habit. His custom was to rise at four o'clock in the morning, to spend thirteen hours daily in his study, and to ride out after dinner to some lonely grove, where he dismounted and walked by himself, with a notebook ready at hand for the arrest of stray thoughts. Evidently he

possessed one of those rare temperaments to which the severest intellectual exercise is a source of the keenest enjoyment; and though he must often have strayed into the comparatively dreary labyrinths of metaphysical puzzles, his speculations had always an immediate reference to what he calls "Divine things." Once, he tells us, as he rode into the woods in 1737, and alighted according to custom "to walk in Divine contemplation and prayer," he had so extraordinary a view of the glory of the Son of God, and his wonderful grace, that he remained for about an hour "in a flood of tears and weeping aloud." This intensity of spiritual vision was frequently combined with a harrowing sense of his own corruption. "My wickedness," he says, "as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable; like an infinite deluge or mountains over my head." Often, for many years, he has had in his mind and his mouth the words "Infinite upon infinite!" His heart looks to him like "an abyss infinitely deeper than hell;" and yet, he adds, it seems to him that "his conviction of sin is exceedingly small." Whilst weeping and crying for his sins, he seemed to know that "his repentance was nothing to his sin" (i. 41). Extravagant expressions of this kind are naturally rather shocking to the outsider; and to those who are

incapable of sympathising, they may even appear to be indications of hypocrisy. Nobody was more alive than Edwards himself to the danger of using such phrases mechanically. When you call yourself the worst of men, he says, be careful that you do not think highly of yourself just because you think so meanly. And if you reply, "No, I have not a high opinion of my humility; it seems to me I am as proud as the devil;" ask again, "whether on this very account that you think yourself as proud as the devil, you do not think yourself to be very humble" (iv. 282). That is a characteristic bit of subtilising, and it indicates the danger of all this excessive introspection. Edwards would not have accepted the moral that the best plan is to think about yourself as little as possible; for from his point of view this constant cross-examination of all your feelings, this dissection of emotion down to its finest and most intricate convolutions, was of the very essence of religion. No one, however, can read his account of his own feelings, even when he runs into the accustomed phraseology, without perceiving the ring of genuine feeling. He is morbid, it may be, but he is not insincere; and even his strained hyperboles are scarcely unintelligible when considered as the expression of the sentiment produced by the effort of a

human being to live constantly in presence of the absolute and the infinite.

The event which most powerfully influenced Edwards' mind during his life at Northampton was one of those strange spiritual storms which then, as now, swept periodically across the Churches. Protestants generally call them revivals; in Catholic countries they impel pilgrims to some devotional shrine; Edwards and his contemporaries described such a phenomenon as "a remarkable outpouring of God's Holy Spirit." He has carefully described the symptoms of one such commotion, in which he was a main agent; and two or three later treatises, discussing some of the problems suggested by the scenes he witnessed, testify to the profoundness of the impression upon his mind. In fact, as we shall presently see, Edwards' whole philosophical system was being put to a practical test by these events. Was the excitement, as modern observers would say, due to a mere moral epidemic, or was it actually produced by the direct interposition in human affairs of the Almighty Ruler? Unhesitatingly recognising the hand of the God the very thought of whom crushed him into self-annihilation, Edwards is unconsciously troubled by the strange contrast between the effect and the stupendous cause assigned for it. When the angel

of the Lord comes down to trouble the waters, one would expect rather to see oceans upheaved, than a trifling ripple in an insignificant pond. There is something almost pathetic in his eagerness to magnify the proportions of the event. He boasts that in six months "more than three hundred souls were savingly brought home to Christ in this town" (iii. 23). The town itself, it may be observed, though then one of the most populous in the country, was only of eighty-two years' standing, and reckoned about two hundred families, the era of Chicagos not having yet dawned upon the world. The conversion, however, of this village appeared to some "divines and others" to herald the approach of the "conflagration" (iii. 59); and though Edwards disavows this rash conjecture, he anticipates with some confidence the approach of the millennium. The "isles and ships of Tarshish," mentioned in Isaiah, are plainly meant for America, which is to be "the first-fruits of that glorious day" (iii. 154); and he collects enough accounts of various revivals of an analogous kind which had taken place in Salzburg, Holland, and several of the British Colonies, to justify the anticipation "that these universal commotions are the forerunners of something exceeding glorious approaching" (iii. 414). The limited area of the disturbance perhaps

raised less difficulty than the equivocal nature of many of the manifestations. In Edwards' imagination, Satan was always on the watch to produce an imitation, and, it would seem, a curiously accurate imitation, of the Divine impulses. As De Foe says, in a different sense—

> "Wherever God erects a house of prayer,
> The devil always builds a chapel there."

And some people were unkind enough to trace in the diseases and other questionable products of the revival a distinct proof of the "operation of the evil spirit" (iii. 96). Edwards felt the vital importance of distinguishing between the two classes of supernatural agency, so different in their source, and yet so thoroughly similar in their effects. There is something rather touching, though at times our sympathy is not quite unequivocal, in the simplicity with which he traces distinct proofs of the Divine hand in the familiar phenomena of religious conversions. The stories seem stale and profitless to us which he accepted with awe-stricken reverence as a demonstrative testimony to the Divinity of the work. He gives, for example, an anecdote of a young woman, who, being jealous of another conversion, resolved to bring about her own by the rather naïf expedient of reading the Bible straight through.

Having begun her task on Monday, the desired effect was produced on Thursday, and she felt it possible to skip at once to the New Testament. The crisis ran through its usual course, ending in a state of rapture, during which she enjoyed for days "a kind of beatific vision of God." The poor girl was very ill, and expressed "great longings to die." When her brother read in Job about worms feeding on the dead body, she "appeared with a pleasant smile, and said it was sweet to her to think of her being in such circumstances" (iii. 69). The longing was speedily gratified, and she departed, perhaps not to find in another world that the universe had been laid out precisely in accordance with the theories of Mr Jonathan Edwards, but at least leaving behind her—so we are assured—memories of touching humility and spirituality. If Abigail Hutchinson strikes us as representing, on the whole, rather a morbid type of human excellence, what are we to say to Phebe Bartlet, who had just passed her fourth birthday in April 1735? (iii. 70.) This infant, of more than Yankee precocity, was converted by her brother, who had just gone through the same process at the age of eleven. She took to "secret prayer," five or six times a day, and would never suffer herself to be interrupted. Her experiences are given

at great length, including a refusal to eat plums, "because it was sin;" her extreme interest in a thought suggested to her by a text from the Revelation, about "supping with God;" and her request to her father to replace a cow which a poor man had lost. She took great delight in "private religious meetings," and was specially edified by the sermons of Mr Edwards, for whom she professed, as he records, with perhaps some pardonable complacency, the warmest affection. The grotesque side of the story of this detestable infant is, however, blended with something more shocking. The poor little wretch was tormented by the fear of hell-fire; and her relations and pastor appear to have done their best to stimulate this, as well as other religious sentiments. Edwards boasts at a subsequent period that "hundreds of little children" had testified to the glory of God's work (iii. 146). He afterwards remarks incidentally that many people had considered as "intolerable" the conduct of the ministers in "frightening poor innocent little children with talk of hell-fire and eternal damnation" (iii. 200). And indeed we cannot deny that when reading some of the sermons to which poor Phebe Bartlet must have listened, and remembering the nature of the audience, the fingers of an unregenerate person clench themselves

involuntarily as grasping an imaginary horsewhip. The answer given by Edwards does not diminish the impression. Innocent as children may seem to be, he replies, "yet if they are out of Christ, they are not so in God's sight, but are young vipers, and are infinitely more hateful than vipers, and are in a most miserable condition as well as grown persons; and they are naturally very senseless and stupid, being *born as the wild asses' colt*, and need much to awaken them" (iii. 200). Doubtless they got it, and if we will take Edwards' word for it, the awakening process never did harm in any one instance. Here we are touching the doctrines which naturally excite a fierce revolt of the conscience against the most repulsive of all theological dogmas, though unfortunately a revolt which is apt to generate an indiscriminating hostility.

The revival gradually spent its force; and, as usual, the more unpleasant symptoms began to assume greater prominence as the more spiritual impulse decayed. In Edwards' phraseology, "it began to be very sensible that the Spirit of God was gradually withdrawing from us, and after this time Satan seemed to be set more loose, and raged in a dreadful manner" (iii. 77). From the beginning of the excitement, the usual physical manifestations, leapings and roarings and convulsions (iii. 131,

205), had shown themselves; and Edwards labours to show that in this case they were genuine marks of a Divine impulse, and not of mere enthusiasm as in the externally similar cases of the Quakers, the French prophets, and others (iii. 109). Now, however, more startling phenomena presented themselves. Satan persuaded a highly respectable citizen to cut his throat. Others saw visions, and had fancied inspirations; whilst from some hints it would seem probable that grosser outrages on morality resulted from indiscriminate gatherings of frenzied enthusiasts (iii. 284). Finally, people's minds were diverted by the approach of his Excellency the Governor to settle an Indian treaty; and the building of a new meeting-house altered the channel of enthusiasm (iii. 79). Northampton settled down into its normal tranquillity.

Some years passed, and, as religious zeal cooled, Edwards became involved in characteristic difficulties. The pastor, it may easily be supposed, was not popular with the rising generation. He had, as he confesses with his usual candour, "a constitution in many respects peculiarly unhappy, attended with flaccid solids; vapid, sizy, and scarce fluids; and a low tide of spirits; often occasioning a kind of childish weakness and contemptibleness of speech, presence, and demeanour; with a

disagreeable dulness and stiffness, much unfitting me for conversation, but more especially for the government of a college," which he was requested to undertake (i. 86). He was, says his admiring biographer, "thorough in the government of his children," who consequently "reverenced, esteemed, and loved him." He adopted the plan, less popular now than then, and even more decayed in America than in England, of "thoroughly subduing" his children as soon as they showed any tendency to self-will. He was a "great enemy" to all "vain amusements;" and even after his children had grown up, he enforced their abstinence from such "pernicious practice," and never allowed them to be out after nine at night. Any gentleman, we are happy to add, was given proper opportunities for courting his daughters after consulting their parents, but on condition of conforming strictly to the family regulations (i. 52, 53). This Puritan discipline appears to have succeeded with Edwards' own family; but a gentleman with flaccid solids, vapid fluids, and a fervent belief in hell-fire, is seldom appreciated by the youth even of a Puritan village.

Accordingly, Edwards got into trouble by endeavouring to force his own notions of discipline amongst certain young people, belonging to "considerable families," who

were said to indulge in loose conversation and equivocal books. They possibly preferred "Pamela," which had then just revealed a new source of amusement to the world, to awakening sermons; and Edwards' well-meant efforts to suppress the evil set the town "in a blaze" (i. 64). A more serious quarrel followed. Edwards maintained the doctrine, which had been gradually dying out amongst the descendants of the Puritans, that converted persons alone should be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The practice had been different at Northampton; and when Edwards announced his intention of enforcing the test of professed conversion, a vigorous controversy ensued. The dispute lasted for some years, with much mutual recrimination. A kind of ecclesiastical council, formed from the neighbouring churches, decided by a majority of one that he should be dismissed if his people desired it; and the people voted for his dismissal by a majority of more than 200 to 20 (i. 69).

Edwards was thus a martyr to his severe sense of discipline. His admirers have lamented over the sentence by which the ablest of American thinkers was banished in a kind of disgrace. Impartial readers will be inclined to suspect that those who suffered under so rigorous a spiritual ruler had perhaps some reason on their side. However that may be, and I do not

presume to have any opinion upon a question involving such complex ecclesiastical disputes, the result to literature was fortunate. In 1751 Edwards was appointed to a mission for Indians, founded at Stockbridge in the remotest corner of Massachusetts, where a few remnants of the aborigines were settled on a township granted by the colony. There were great hopes, we are told, of the probable influence of the mission, which were destined to frustration from accidental causes. The hopes can hardly have rested on the character of the preacher. It is difficult to imagine a more grotesque relation between a minister and his congregation than that which must have subsisted between Edwards and his barbarous flock. He had remarked pathetically in one of his writings on the very poor prospect open to the Houssatunnuck Indians, if their salvation depended on the study of the evidences of Christianity (iv. 245). And if Edwards preached upon the topics of which his mind was fullest, their case would have been still harder. For it was in the remote solitudes of this retired corner that he gave himself up to those abstruse meditations on freewill and original sin which form the substance of his chief writings. A sermon in the Houssatunnuck language, if Edwards ever acquired that tongue, upon predestination, the differences between the Arminian

and the Calvinist schemes, Liberty of Indifference, and other such doctrines, would hardly be an improving performance. If, however, his labours in this department "were attended with no remarkable visible success" (i. 83), he thought deeply and wrote much. The publication of his treatise on the Freedom of the Will followed in 1754, and upon the strength of the reputation which it won for him, he was appointed President of New Jersey College in the end of 1757, only to die of small-pox in the following March. His death cut short some considerable literary schemes, not, however, of a kind calculated to add to his reputation. Various remains were published after his death, and we have ample materials for forming a comprehensive judgment of his theories. In one shape or another he succeeded in giving utterance to his theory upon the great problems of life; and there is little cause for regret that he did not succeed in completing that "History of the Work of Redemption" which was to have been his *opus magnum*. He had neither the knowledge nor the faculties for making much of a Puritan view of universal history, and he has left a sufficient indication of his general conception of such a book.

The book upon the Freedom of the Will, which is his main title to philosophical fame, bears marks of

the conditions under which it was composed, and which certainly did not tend to confer upon an abstruse treatise any additional charm. Edwards' style is heavy and languid; he seldom indulges in an illustration, and those which he gives are far from lively; it is only at rare intervals that his logical ingenuity in stating some intricate argument clothes his thought in language of corresponding neatness. He has, in fact, the faults natural to an isolated thinker. He gives his readers credit for being familiar with the details of the labyrinth in which he had wandered till every intricacy was plainly mapped out in his own mind, and frequently dwells at tiresome length upon some refinement which probably never occurred to any one but himself. A writer who, like Hume, is at once an acute thinker and a great literary artist, is content to aim a decisive blow at the vital points of the theory which he is opposing, and leaves to his readers the task of following out more remote consequences; Edwards, after winning the decisive victory, insists upon attacking his adversary in every position in which he might conceivably endeavour to entrench himself. It seems to be his aim to answer every objection which could possibly be suggested, and, of course, he answers many objections which no one

would raise, whilst probably omitting others of which no forethought could warn him. The book reads like a verbatim report of those elaborate dialogues which he was in the habit of holding with himself in his solitary ramblings. There is some truth in Goldsmith's remark upon the ease of gaining an argumentative victory when you are at once opponent and respondent. It must be added, however, that any man who is at all fond of speculation finds in his second self the most obstinate and perplexing of antagonists. No one else raises such a variety of empty and vexatious quibbles, and splits hairs with such surprising versatility. It is true that your double often shows a certain discretion, and whilst obstinately defending certain untenable positions contrives to glide over some weak places, which come to light with provoking unexpectedness when you are encountered by an external enemy. Edwards, indeed, guards himself with extreme care by an elaborate system of logical divisions and subdivisions against the possibility of so unpleasant a surprise; but no man can dispense with the aid of a living antagonist, free from all suspicion of being a man of straw. The opponents against whom he labours most strenuously were unfortunately very feeble creatures for the most part; such as poor

Chubb, the Deist, and the once well-known Dr Whitby, who had changed sides in more than one controversy with more credit to his candour than to his force of mind. Certain difficulties may, therefore, have evaded the logical network in which he tried to enclose them; but, on the whole, he is rather over than under anxious to stop every conceivable loophole. Condensation, with a view to placing the vital points of his doctrine in more salient relief, would have greatly improved his treatise. But the fault is natural in a philosophical recluse, more intent upon thorough investigation than upon lucid exposition.

Without following his intricate reasonings, the main position may be indicated in a few words. The doctrine, in fact, which Edwards asserted may be said to be simply that everything has a cause, and that human volitions are no more an exception to this universal law than any other class of phenomena. This belief in the universality of causation rests with him upon a primary intuition (v. 55), and not upon experience; and his whole argument pursues the metaphysical method instead of appealing, as a modern school would appeal, to the results of observation. The Arminian opponent of necessity must, as he argues, either deny this self-evident principle, or be

confined to statements purely irrelevant to the really important question. The book is occupied in hunting down all the evasions by which these conclusions may be escaped, and in showing that the true theory, when rightly understood, is obnoxious to no objections on the score of morality. The ordinary mode of meeting the argument is by appealing to consciousness. We know that we are free, as Dr Johnson said, and there's an end on't. Edwards shows at great length, and in many forms, that this summary reply involves a confusion between the two very different propositions: "We can do what we will," and "We can will what we will." Consciousness really testifies that, if we desire to raise our right hand, our right hand will rise in the absence of external compulsion. It does not show that the desire itself may either exist or not exist, independently of any preceding causes either external or internal. The ordinary definition of free-will assumes an infinite series of volitions, each determining all that has gone before; or, to let Edwards speak for himself, and it will be a sufficient specimen of his style, he says in a passage which sums up the whole argument, that the assertion of free-will either amounts to the merely verbal proposition that you have power to will what you have power to will; "or

the meaning must be that a man has power to will as he pleases or chooses to will; that is, he has power by one act of choice to choose another; by an antecedent act of will to choose a consequent act, and therein to execute his own choice. And if this be their meaning, it is nothing but shuffling with those they dispute with, and baffling their own reason. For still the question returns, wherein lies man's liberty in that antecedent act of will which chose the consequent act? The answer, according to the same principle, must be, that his liberty lies also in his willing as he would, or as he chose, or agreeably to another act of choice preceding that. And so the question returns *in infinitum* and again *in infinitum*. In order to support their opinion there must be no beginning, but free acts of the will must have been chosen by foregoing acts of will in the soul of every man without beginning, and so before he had a beginning."

The heads of most people begin to swim when they have proceeded but a short way into such argumentation; but Edwards delights in applying similar logical puzzles over and over again to confute the notions of a "self-determining power in the will," or of a "liberty of indifferency;" of the power of suspending

the action even if the judgment has pronounced its verdict; of Archbishop King's ingenious device of putting the cart before the horse, and declaring that our delight is not the cause but the consequence of our will; or Clarke's theory of liberty, as consisting in agency which seems to erect an infinite number of subsidiary first causes in the wills of all created beings. A short cut to the same conclusions consists in simply denying the objective reality of chance or contingency; but Edwards has no love of short cuts in such matters, or rather cannot refuse himself the pleasure of following the circuitous route as well as explaining the more direct method.

This main principle established, Edwards has of course no difficulty in showing that the supposed injury to morality rests on a misconception of the real doctrine. If volitions, instead of being caused, are the products of arbitrary chance, morality becomes meaningless. We approve or disapprove of an action precisely because it implies the existence of motives, good or bad. Punishment and reward would be useless if actions were after all a matter of chance; and if merit implied the existence of free-will, the formation of virtuous habits would detract from a man's merit in so far as they tend to make virtue necessary. So far, in

short, as you admit the existence of an element of pure chance, you restrict the sphere of law; and therefore morality, so far from excluding, necessarily involves an invariable connection between motives and actions.

Arguments of this kind, sufficiently familiar to all students of the subject, are combined with others of a more doubtful character. Edwards has no hesitation about dealing with the absolute and the infinite. He dwells, for example, with great ingenuity upon the difficulty of reconciling the Divine prescience with the contingency of human actions, and has no scruple in inferring the possibility of reconciling virtue with necessity from the fact that God is at once the type of all perfection, and is under a necessity to be perfect. If such arguments would be rejected as transcending the limits of human intelligence by many who agree with his conclusions, others, equally characteristic, are as much below the dignity of a metaphysician. Edwards draws his proofs with the same equanimity from the most abstruse speculations as from a child-like belief in the literal inspiration of the Scriptures. He "proves," for example, God's foreknowledge of human actions from such facts as Micaiah's prophecy of Ahab's sin, and Daniel's acquaintance with the "horrid wickedness" about to be committed by

Antiochus Epiphanes. It is a pleasant supposition that a man who did not believe that God could foretell events, would be awed by the authority of a text; but Edwards' polemic is almost exclusively directed against the hated Arminians, and he appears to be unconscious of the existence of a genuine sceptic. He observes that he has never read Hobbes (v. 260); and though in another work he makes a brief allusion to Hume, he never refers to him in these speculations, whilst covering the same ground as one of the admirable *Essays*.

This simplicity is significant of Edwards' unique position. The doctrine of Calvinism, by whatever name it may be called, is a mental tonic of tremendous potency. Whether in its theological dress, as attributing all events to the absolute decrees of the Almighty, or in its metaphysical dress, as declaring that some abstract necessity governs the world, or in the shape more familiar to modern thinkers, in which it proclaims the universality of what has been called the reign of law, it conquers or revolts the imagination. It forces us to conceive of all phenomena as so many links

> "In the eternal chain
> Which none can break, nor slip, nor overreach;"

and can, therefore, be accepted only by men who

possess the rare power of combining their beliefs into a logical whole. Most people contrive to shirk the consequences, either by some of those evasions which, as Edwards showed, amount to asserting the objective existence of chance, or more commonly by forbidding their reason to follow the chain of inferences through more than a few links. The axiom that the cause of a cause is also the cause of the thing caused, though verbally admitted, is beyond the reach of most intellects. People are willing to admit that A is irrevocably joined to B, B to C, and so on to the end of the alphabet, but they refuse to realise the connection between A and Z. The annoyance excited by Mr Buckle's enunciation of some very familiar propositions, is a measure of the reluctance of the popular imagination to accept a logical conclusion. When the dogma is associated with a belief in eternal damnation, the consequences are indeed terrible; and therefore it was natural that Calvinism should have become an almost extinct creed, and the dogma have been left to the free-thinkers who had not that awful vision before their eyes. Hobbes, Collins, and Hume, the three writers with whom the opinion was chiefly associated in English literature, were also the three men who were regarded as most emphatically the devil's advocates.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was indeed adopted by Hartley, by his disciple Priestley, and by Abraham Tucker, all of whom were Christians after a fashion. But they reconciled themselves to the belief by peculiar forms of optimism. Tucker maintained the odd fancy that every man would ultimately receive a precisely equal share of happiness, and thought that a few thousand years of damnation would be enough for all practical purposes. If I remember rightly, he roughly calculated the amount of misery to be endured by human beings at about two minutes' suffering in a century. Hartley maintained the still more remarkable thesis that, in some non-natural sense, "all individuals are always and actually infinitely happy." But Edwards, though an optimist in a very different sense, was alone amongst contemporary writers of any speculative power in asserting at once the doctrine that all events are the result of the Divine will, and the doctrine of eternal damnation. His mind, acute as it was, yet worked entirely in the groove provided for it. The revolting consequences to which he was led by not running away from his premisses, never for an instant suggested to him that the premisses might conceivably be false. He accepts a belief in hell-fire, interpreted after the popular fashion, without

a murmur, and deduces from it all those consequences which most theologians have evaded or covered with a judicious veil.

Edwards was luckily not an eloquent man, for his sermons would in that case have been amongst the most terrible of human compositions. But, if ever he warms into something like eloquence, it is when he is endeavouring to force upon the imaginations of his hearers the horrors of their position. Perhaps the best specimen of his powers in this department is a sermon which we are told produced a great effect at the time of revivals, and to which, we may as well remember, Phebe Bartlet may probably have listened. Read that sermon (vol. vii., sermon xv.) and endeavour to picture the scene of its original delivery. Imagine the congregation of rigid Calvinists, prepared by previous scenes of frenzy and convulsion, and longing for the fierce excitement which was the only break in the monotony of their laborious lives. And then imagine Edwards ascending the pulpit, with his flaccid solids and vapid fluids, and the pale drawn face, in which we can trace an equal resemblance to the stern Puritan forefathers and to the keen sallow New Englander of modern times. He gives out as his text, "Sinners shall slide in due time," and the title of

his sermon is, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." For a full hour he dwells with unusual vehemence on the wrath of the Creator and the sufferings of the creature. His sentences, generally languid and complex, condense themselves into short, almost gasping asseverations. God is angry with the wicked; as angry with the living wicked as "with many of those miserable creatures that He is now tormenting in hell." The devil is waiting: the fire is ready; the furnace is hot; the "glittering sword is whet and held over them, and the pit hath opened her mouth to receive them." The unconverted are walking on a rotten covering, where there are innumerable weak places, and those places not distinguishable. The flames are "gathering and lashing about" the sinner, and all that preserves him for a moment is "the mere arbitrary will and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God." But does not God love sinners? Hardly in a comforting sense. "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some other loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; . . . you are ten thousand times as abominable in His eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours." The

comparison of man to a loathsome viper is one of the metaphors to which Edwards most habitually recurs (*e.g.*, vii. 167, 179, 182, 198, 344, 496). No relief is possible; Edwards will have no attempt to explain away the eternity of which he speaks; there will be no end to the "exquisite horrible misery" of the damned. You, when damned, "will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this Almighty merciless vengeance: and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains." Nor might his hearers fancy that, as respectable New England Puritans, they had no personal interest in the question. It would be awful, he says, if we could point to one definite person in this congregation as certain to endure such torments. "But, alas! instead of one, how many is it likely will remember this discourse in hell? It would be a wonder if some that are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons that now sit here in some seats of this meeting-house in health, and quiet and secure, should be there before to-morrow morning."

With which blessing he dismissed the congregation

to their dinners, with such appetites as might be left to them. The strained excitement which marks this pleasing production could not be maintained; but Edwards never shrank in cold blood from the most appalling consequences of his theories. He tells us with superlative coolness, that the "bulk of mankind do throng" to hell (vii. 226). He sentences infants to hell as remorselessly as the *durus pater infantum*, Augustine. The imagination, he admits, may be relieved by the hypothesis that infants suffer only in this world, instead of being doomed to eternal misery. "But it does not at all relieve one's reason;" and that is the only faculty which he will obey (vi. 461). Historically the doctrine is supported by the remark that God did not save the children in Sodom, and that He actually commanded the slaughter of the Midianitish infants. "Happy shall he be," it is written of Edom, "that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (vi. 255). Philosophically he remarks that "a young viper has a malignant nature, though incapable of doing a malignant action" (vi. 471), and quotes with approval the statement of a Jewish Rabbi, that a child is wicked as soon as born, "for at the same time that he sucks the breasts he follows his lust" (vi. 482), which is perhaps the superlative expression of the

theory that all natural instincts are corrupt. Finally, he enforces the only doctrine which can equal this in horror, namely, that the saints rejoice in the damnation of the wicked. In a sermon called "Wicked Men useful in their Destruction only" (vol. viii., sermon xxi.), he declares that "the view of the doleful condition of the damned will make them (the saints in heaven) more prize their own blessedness." They will realise the wonderful grace of God, who has made so great a difference between them and others of the same species, "who are no worse by nature than they, and have deserved no worse of God than they." "When they shall look upon the damned," he exclaims, "and see their misery, how will heaven ring with the praises of God's justice towards the wicked, and His grace towards the saints!" And with how much greater enlargement of heart will they praise Jesus Christ their Redeemer, that ever He was pleased to set His love upon them, His dying love!"

Was the man who could utter such blasphemous sentiments—for so they undoubtedly appear to us—a being of ordinary flesh and blood? One would rather have supposed his solids to be of bronze, and his fluids of vitriol, than have attributed to them the character which he describes. That he should have been a gentle,

meditative creature, around whose knees had clung eleven "young vipers" of his own begetting, is certainly an astonishing reflection. And yet, to do Edwards justice, we must remember two things. In the first place, the responsibility for such ghastly beliefs cannot be repudiated by any one who believes in the torments of hell. Catholics and Protestants must share the opprobrium due to the assertion of this tremendous doctrine. Nor does Arminianism really provide more than a merely verbal escape from the difficulty. The "semi-Pelagian" Jeremy Taylor, for example, draws a picture of hell quite as fearful and as material as Edwards', and, if animated by a less fanatical spirit, adorned by an incomparably more vivid fancy. He specially improves upon Edwards' description by introducing the sense of smell. The tyrant who fastened the dead to the living, invented an exquisite torment; "but what is this in respect of hell, when each body of the damned is more loathsome and unsavoury than a million of dead dogs, and all those pressed and crowded together in so strait a compass? Bonaventure goes so far as to say that if one only of the damned were brought into this world, it were sufficient to infect the whole earth. Neither shall the devils send forth a better smell; for although they are spirits, yet those

fiery bodies unto which they are fastened and confined shall be of a more pestilential flavour." It is vain to attempt an extenuation of the horror, by relieving the Almighty from the responsibility of this fearful prison-house. The dogma of free-will is a transparent mockery. It simply enables the believer to retain the hideous side of his creed by abandoning the rational side. To pass over the objection that by admitting the existence of chance it really destroys all intelligible measures of merit and of justice, the really awful dogma remains. You still believe that God has made man too weak to stand alone, that He has placed him amidst temptations where his fall, if not rigidly certain in a given case, is still inevitable for the mass, and then torments him eternally for his wickedness. Whether a man is slain outright, or merely placed without help to wander at random through innumerable pit-falls, makes no real difference in the character of the action. Theologians profess horror at the doctrine of infantile damnation, though they cannot always make up their minds to disavow it explicitly, but they will find it easier to condemn the doctrine than effectually to repudiate all responsibility. To the statement that it follows logically from the dogma of original sin, they reply that logic is out of place in such questions. But, if this be granted, do

they not maintain doctrines as hideous, when calmly examined? It is blasphemous, we are told, to say with Edwards, that God holds the "little vipers," whom we call "helpless innocents," suspended over the pit of hell, and drops millions of them into ruthless torments. Certainly it is blasphemous. But is an infant really more helpless than the poor savage of Australia or St Giles, surrounded from his birth with cruel and brutal natures, and never catching one glimpse of celestial light? Nay, when the question is between God and man, does not the difference between the infant and the philosopher or the statesman vanish into nothing? All, whatever figment of free-will may be set up, are equally helpless in face of the surrounding influences which mould their characters and their fate. Young children, the heterodox declare, are innocent. But the theologian replies with unanswerable truth, that God looks at the heart and not at the actions, and that science and theology are at one in declaring that in the child are the germs of the adult man. If human nature is corrupt and therefore hateful to God, Edwards is quite right in declaring that the bursting bud must be as hateful as the full-grown tree. To beings of a loftier order, to say nothing of a Being of infinite power and wisdom, the petty race of man would appear as helpless as insects

appear to us, and the distinction between the children or the ignorant, and the wise and full-grown, an irrelevant refinement.

It is of course true that the patient reception of this and similar doctrines would indicate at the present day a callous heart or a perverted intellect. Though, in the sphere of abstract speculation, we cannot draw any satisfactory line between the man and the infant, there is a wide gap to the practical imagination. A man ought to be shocked when confronted with this fearfully concrete corollary to his theories. But the blame should be given where it is due. The Calvinist is not to blame for the theory of universal law which he shares with the philosopher, but for the theory of damnation which he shares with the Arminian. The hideous dogma is the existence of the prison-house, not the belief that its inmates are sent there by God's inscrutable decree, instead of being drafted into it by lot. And here we come to the second fact which must be remembered in Edwards' favour. The living truths in his theory are chained to dead fancies, and the fancies have an odour as repulsive as Taylor's "million of dead dogs." But on the truths is founded a religious and moral system of morality which, however erroneous it may appear to some thinkers, is conspicuous for its vigour

and loftiness. Edwards often shows himself a worthy successor of the great men who led the moral revolt of the Reformation. Amongst some very questionable metaphysics and much outworn—sometimes repulsive—superstition, he grasps the central truths on which all really noble morality must be based. The mode in which they presented themselves to his mind may be easily traced. Calvinism, logically developed, leads to Pantheism. The absolute sovereignty of God, the doctrine to which Edwards constantly returns, must be extended over all nature as well as over the fate of the individual human soul. The peculiarity of Edwards' mind was, that the doctrine had thus expanded along particular lines of thought, without equally affecting others. He is a kind of Spinoza-Mather; he combines, that is, the logical keenness of the great metaphysician with the puerile superstitions of the New England divine; he sees God in all nature, and yet believes in the degrading supernaturalism of the Salem witches. The object of his faith, in short, is the "infinite Jehovah" (vi. 170), the God to whose all pervading power none can set a limit, and who is yet the tutelary deity of a petty clan; and there is something almost bewildering in the facility with which he passes from one conception to the other without

the smallest consciousness of any discontinuity. Of his coincidence in the popular theories, and especially in the doctrine of damnation, I have already given instances. His utterances derived from a loftier source are given with equal emphasis. At the age of fifteen or sixteen he had said, "God and real existence are the same; God is, and there is none else."* The same doctrine is the foundation of the theories expounded in his treatises on Virtue and on the End of God in Creation. In the last of these, for example, he uses the argument (depending upon a conception familiar to the metaphysicians of the previous age), that benevolence, consisting in regard to "Being in general," must be due to any being in proportion to the degree of existence (ii. 401). Now "all other being is as nothing in comparison of the Divine Being." God is "the foundation and fountain of all being and all perfection, from whom all is perfectly derived, and on whom all is most absolutely and perfectly dependent; whose being and beauty is, as it were, the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence, much more than the sun is the

* See an interesting article in the "American Cyclopædia," which has, however, this odd peculiarity, that it never mentions hell in discussing the theories of Edwards.

fountain and summary comprehension of all the light and brightness of the day" (ii. 405). As he says in the companion treatise, "the eternal and infinite Being is, in effect, being in general, and comprehends universal existence" (vi. 59). The only end worthy of God must, therefore, be His own glory. This is not to attribute selfishness to God, for "in God, the love of Himself and the love of the public are not to be distinguished as in man, because God's being, as it were, comprehends all" (vi. 53). In communicating His fulness to His creatures, He is of necessity the ultimate end; but it is a fallacy to make God and the creature in this affair of the emanation of the Divine fulness "the opposite parts of a disjunction" (vi. 55). The creature's love of God and complacence in the Divine perfections are the same thing as the manifestation of the Divine glory. "They are all but the emanations of God's glory, or the excellent brightness and fulness of the Divinity diffused, overflowing, and, as it were, enlarged; or, in one word, existing *ad extra*" (vi. 117). In more familiar dialect, our love to God is but God's goodness making itself objective. The only knowledge which deserves the name is the knowledge of God, and virtue is but the knowledge of God under a different name.

Without dwelling upon the relations of this doctrine to modern forms of Pantheism, I must consider this last proposition, which is of vital importance in Edwards' system, and of which the theological and the metaphysical element is curiously blended. God is to the universe—to use Edwards' own metaphor—what the sun is to our planet; and the metaphor would have been more adequate if he had been acquainted with modern science. The sun's action is the primary cause of all the infinitely complex play of forces which manifest themselves in the fall of a raindrop or in the operations of a human brain. But as some bodies may seem to resist the action of the sun's rays, so may some created beings set themselves in opposition to the Divine Will. To a thorough-going Pantheist, indeed, such an opposition must appear to be impossible if we look deep enough, and sin, in this sense, be merely an illusion, caused by our incapacity of taking in the whole design of the Almighty. Edwards, however, though dimly aware of the difficulty, is not so consistent in his Pantheism as to be much troubled with it. He admits that, by some mysterious process, corruption has intruded itself into the Divine universe. The all-pervading harmony is marred by a discord due, in his phraseology, to the fall of man. Over

the ultimate cause of this discord lies a veil which can never be withdrawn to mortal intelligence. Assuming its existence, however, virtue consists, if one may so speak, in that quality which fits a man to be a conducting medium, and vice in that which makes him a non-conducting medium to the solar forces. This proposition is confounded in Edwards' mind, as in that of most metaphysicians, with the very different proposition that virtue consists in recognising the Divine origin of those forces. It is characteristic, in fact, of his metaphysical school, to identify the logical with the causal connection, and to assume that the definition of a thing necessarily constitutes its essence. "Virtue," says Edwards, "is the union of heart to being in general, or to God, the Being of beings" (ii. 421), and thus consists in the intellectual apprehension of Deity, and in the emotion founded upon and necessarily involving the apprehension. The doctrine that whatever is done so as to promote the glory of God is virtuous, is with him identified with the doctrine that whatever is done consciously, in order to promote the glory of God, is virtuous. The major premise of the syllogism which proves an action to be virtuous must be actually present to the mind of the agent. This, in utilitarian phraseology, is to confound between the criterion and the

motive. If it is, as Edwards says, the test of a virtuous action that it should tend to "the highest good of being in general," it does not follow that an action is only virtuous when done with a conscious reference to that end. But Edwards overlooks or denies the distinction, and assumes, for example, as an evident corollary, that a love of children or friends is only virtuous in so far as it is founded on a desire for the general good, which, in his sense, is a desire for the glory of God (ii. 428). He judges actions, that is, not by their tendency, but by their nature; and their nature is equivalent to their logic.

His metaphysical theory coincides precisely with his theological view, and is generally expressed in theological language. The love of "Being in general" is the love of God. The intellectual intuition is the reflection of the inward light, and the recognition of a mathematical truth is but a different phase of the process which elsewhere produces conversion. Intuition is a kind of revelation, and revelation is a special intuition.

One of his earliest published sermons is devoted to prove the existence of "a Divine and supernatural light, immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God" (vol. viii., sermon xxvii.) On that fundamental doctrine his whole theological system is based; as his metaphysi-

cal system rests on the existence of absolute *à priori* truths. The knowledge of God sums up all true beliefs, and justifies all virtuous emotions, as the power of God supports all creation at every instant. "It is by a Divine influence that the laws of nature are upheld, and a constant concurrence of Divine power is necessary in order to our being, moving, or having a being" (v. 419). To be constantly drawing sustenance from the eternal power which everywhere underlies the phenomena of the world is the necessary condition of spiritual life, as to breathe the air is the condition of physical life. The force which this conception, whether true or false, exercises over the imagination, and the depth which it gives to Edwards' moral views, are manifest at every turn. Edwards rises far above those theories, recurring in so many different forms, which place the essence of religion in some outward observances, or in a set of propositions not vitally connected with the spiritual constitution. Edwards' contemporaries, such as Lardner or Sherlock, thought that to be a Christian was to accept certain results of antiquarian research. With a curious *naïveté* they sometimes say that a ploughman or a cobbler could summarily answer the problems which have puzzled generations of critics. Edwards sees the absurdity of

hoping that a genuine faith can ever be based on such balancing of historical probabilities. The cobbler was to be awed by the learned man; but how could he implicitly trust a learned man when his soul was at stake, and when learned men differed? To convince the ignorant or the Houssatunnuck Indian, God's voice must speak through a less devious channel. The transcendent glory of Divine things proves their Divinity intuitively; the mind does not indeed discard argument, but it does not want any "long chain of argument;. the argument is but one and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the Gospel but by one step, and that is its Divine glory." The moral theory of the contemporary rationalists was correlative to their religious theory. To be religious was to believe that certain facts had once happened; to be moral was to believe that under certain circumstances you would at some future time go to hell. Virtue of that kind was not to Edwards' taste, though few men have been less sparing in using the appeal to damnation. But threats of hell-fire were only meant to startle the sinner from his repose. His morality could be framed from no baser material than love to the Divine perfections. "What thanks are due to you for not loving your own misery, and for being

willing to take some pains to escape burning in hell to all eternity? There is ne'er a devil in hell but would gladly do the same" (viii. 145).

The strength, however, and the weakness of Edwards a moralist are best illustrated from the two treatises on the Religious Affections and on Original Sin. The first which was the fruit of his experiences at Northampton, may be described as a system of religious diagnostics. By what symptoms are you to distinguish—that was the problem which forced itself upon him—the spiritual state produced by the Divine action from that which is but a hollow mockery? After his mode of judging in concrete cases, as already indicated, we are rather surprised by the calm and sensible tone of his argument. The deep sense of the vast importance of the events to which he was a witness makes him the more scrupulous in testing their real character. He resists the temptation to dwell upon those noisy and questionable manifestations in which the vulgar thirst for the wonderful found the most appropriate testimony to the work. Roman Catholic archbishops at the present day can exhort their hearers to put their faith in a silly story of a vision, on the express ground that the popularity of the belief amongst Catholics proves its Divine origin. That is wonderfully

like saying that a successful lie should be patronised so long as it is on the side of the Church. Edwards, brought up in a manlier school, deals with such phenomena in a different spirit. Suppose, he says, that a person terrified by threats of hell-fire has a vision "of a person with a beautiful countenance, smiling on him with arms open and with blood dropping down," whom he supposes to be Christ come to promise him eternal life; are we to assume that this vision and the consequent transports infallibly indicate supernatural agency? No, he replies, with equal sense and honesty; "he must have but slightly considered human nature who thinks such things cannot arise in this manner without any supernatural excitement of Divine power" (iv. 72). Many mischievous delusions have their origin in this error. "It is a low, miserable notion of spiritual sense" to suppose that these "external ideas" (ideas, that is, such as enter by the senses) are proofs of Divine interference. Ample experience has shown that they are proofs not of the spiritual health which comes from communion with God, but of "weakness of body and mind and distempers of body" (iv. 143). Marie Alacoque was an exemplary confirmation of Edwards' wisdom. Neither bodily convulsions, nor vehement excitement of mind, nor even revelations of things to

come (iv. 158), are sufficient proofs of that mysterious change of soul which is called conversion. No external test, in fact, can be given. Man cannot judge decisively, but the best symptoms are such proofs as increased humility, a love of Christ for His own sake, without reference to heaven or hell, a sense of the infinite beauty of Divine things, a certain "symmetry and proportion" between the affections themselves (iv. 314), a desire for higher perfection, and a rich harvest of the fruit of Christian practice.

So far, Edwards is unassailable from his own point of view. Our theory of religion may differ from his; but at least he fully realises how profound is the meaning of the word, and aims at conquering all human faculties, not at controlling a few external manifestations. But his further applications of the theory lead him into more doubtful speculations. That Being, a union with whom constitutes true holiness, is not only to be the ideal of perfect goodness, but He must be the God of the Calvinists, who fulfils the stipulations of a strange legal bargain, and the God of the Jews, who sentences whole nations to massacre for the crimes of their ancestors. Edwards has hitherto been really protesting against that lower conception of God which is latent in at least the

popular versions of Catholic or Arminian theology, and to which Calvinism opposes a loftier view. God, on this theory, is not really almighty, for the doctrine of free-will places human actions and their results beyond His control. He is scarcely even omniscient, for, like human rulers, He judges by actions, not by the intrinsic nature of the soul, and therefore distributes His rewards and punishments on a system comparable to that of mere earthly jurisprudence. He is at most the infallible judge of actions, not the universal ordainer of events and distributor of life and happiness. Edwards' profound conviction of the absolute sovereignty of God leads him to reject all such feeble conceptions. But he has now to tell us where the Divine influence has actually displayed itself; and his view becomes strangely narrowed. Instead of confessing that all good gifts come from God, he infers that those which do not come from his own God must be radically vicious. Already, as we have seen, in virtue of his leading principle, he has denied to all natural affections the right to be truly virtuous. Unless they involve a conscious reference to God, they are but delusive resemblances of the reality. He admits that the natural man can in various ways produce very fair imitations of true virtue. By help of association of

ideas, for example, or by the force of sympathy, it is possible that benevolence may become pleasing and malevolence displeasing, even when our own interest is not involved (ii. 436). Nay, there is a kind of moral sense natural to man, which consists in a certain perception of the harmony between sin and punishment, and which, therefore, does not properly spring from self-love. This moral sense may even go so far as to recognise the propriety of yielding all to the God from whom we receive everything (ii. 443), and the justice of the punishment of sinners. And yet this natural conscience does not imply the existence of a "truly virtuous taste or determination of the mind to relish and delight in the essential beauty of true virtue, arising from a virtuous benevolence of the heart" (ii. 445). God has bestowed such instincts upon men for their preservation here; but they will disappear in the next world, where no such need for them exists. He is driven, indeed, to make some vague concessions (against which his enlightened commentators protest), to the effect that "these things [the natural affections] have something of the general nature of virtue, which is love" (ii. 456); but no such uncertain affinity can make them

worthy to be reckoned with that union with God which is the effect of the Divine intervention alone.

Edwards is thus in the singular position of a Pantheist who yet regards all nature as alienated from God; and in the treatise on Original Sin he brings out the more revolting consequences of that view by help of the theological dogma of corruption. He there maintains, in its fullest sense, the terrible thesis, that all men are naturally in a state of which the inevitable issue is their "utter, eternal perdition, as being finally accursed of God and the subjects of His remediless wrath through sin" (vi. 137). The evidence of this appalling statement is made up, with a simplicity which would be amusing if employed in a less fearful cause, of various texts from Scripture, quoted, of course, after the most profoundly unhistorical fashion; of inferences from the universality of death, regarded as the penalty incurred by Adam; of general reflections upon the heathen world and the idolatry of the Jews; and of the sentences pronounced by Jehovah against the Canaanites. In one of his sermons, of portentous length and ferocity (vol. vii., sermon iii.), he expands the doctrine that natural men—which includes all men who have not gone through the mys-

terious process of conversion—are God's enemies. Their heart, he says, "is like a viper, hissing and spitting poison at God;" and God requites their ill-will with undying enmity and never-ceasing torments. Their unconsciousness of that enmity, and even their belief that they are rightly affected towards God, is no proof that the enmity does not exist. The consequences may be conceived. "God who made you has given you a capacity to bear torment; and He has that capacity in His hands; and He can enlarge it and make you capable of more misery, as much as He will. If God hates any one and sets Himself against him as His enemy, what cannot He do with him? How dreadful it must be to fall into the hands of such an enemy!" (vii. 201). How dreadful, we add, is the conception of the universe which implies that God is such an enemy of the bulk of His creatures; and how strangely it combines with the mild Pantheism which traces and adores the hand of God in all natural objects! The doctrine, it is to be observed, which is expanded through many pages of the book on Original Sin, is not merely that men are legally guilty, as being devoid of "true virtue," though possessed of a certain factitious moral sense, but that they are actually for the most part detestably wicked.

One illustration of his method may be sufficient. The vileness of man is proved by the remark (not peculiar to Edwards), that men who used to live 1000 years, now live only 70; whilst throughout Christendom their life does not average more than 40 or 50 years; so that "sensuality and debauchery" have shortened our days to a twentieth part of our former allowance.

Thus the Divine power which is in one sense the sole moving force of the universe, is limited, so far as its operation upon men's hearts is concerned, to that small minority who have gone through the process of conversion as recognised by Edwards' sect. All others, heathens, infants, and the great mass of professed Christians, are sentenced to irretrievable perdition. The simplicity with which he condemns all other forms even of his own religion, is almost touching. He incidentally remarks, for example, that external exercises may not show true virtue, because they have frequently proceeded from false religion. Members of the Romish Church and many ancient "hermits and anchorites" have been most energetic in such exercises, and Edwards once lived next to a Jew who appeared to him "the devoutest person that he ever saw in his life" (iv. 90); but, as he quietly assumes, all such appearances must of course be delusive.

Once more, then, we are brought back to the question, How could any man hold such doctrines without going mad? or, as experience has reconciled us to that phenomenon, How could a man with so many elevated conceptions of the truth reconcile these ghastly conclusions to the nobler part of his creed? Edwards' own explanations of the difficulty—such as they are—do not help us very far. The argument by which he habitually defends the justice of the Almighty sounds very much like a poor quibble in his mouth, though it is not peculiar to him. Our obligation towards God, he says, must be in proportion to His merits; therefore it is infinite. Now there is no merit in paying a debt which we owe; and hence the fullest discharge of our duty deserves no reward. On the other hand, there is demerit in refusing to pay a debt; and therefore any shortcoming deserves an infinite penalty (vi. 155.) Without examining whether our duty is proportional to the perfection of its object, and is irrespective of our capacities, there is one vital objection to this doctrine, which Edwards had adopted from less coherent reasoners. His theory, as I have said, so far from destroying virtue, gives it the fullest possible meaning. There can be no more profound distinction than between the affections which harmonise with the Divine will and those which are discordant,

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though it might puzzle a more consistent Pantheist to account for the existence of the latter. That, however, is a primary doctrine with Edwards. But if virtue remains, it is certain that his theory seems to be destructive both of merit and demerit as between man and God. If we are but clay in the hands of the potter, there is no intelligible meaning in our deserving from him either good or evil. We are as he has made us. Edwards explains, indeed, that the sense of desert implies a certain natural congruity between evil-doing and punishment (ii. 430). But the question recurs, how in such a case the congruity arises? It is one of the illusions which should disappear when we rise to the sphere of the absolute and infinite. The metaphor about a debt and its payment, though common in vulgar Calvinism, is quite below Edwards' usual level of thought. And, if we try to restate the argument in a more congenial form, its force disappears. The love of God, even though imperfect, should surely imply some conformity to His nature; and even an imperfect love should hardly be confounded, one might fancy, with an absolute enmity to the Creator. Though the argument, which is several times repeated, appears to have satisfied Edwards, it would have been more in harmony with his principles to

declare, that as between man and his God, there could be no question of justice. The absolute sovereignty of the Creator is the only, and to him it should be the conclusive, answer to such complaints. But, whatever may be the fate of this apology, the one irremovable difficulty remains behind. If God be the one universal cause of all things, is He not the cause of evil as well as good? Do you not make God, in short, the author of sin?

With this final difficulty, which, indeed, besets all such theories, Edwards struggles long and with less than his usual vigour. He tries to show, and perhaps successfully, that the difficulty concerns his opponents as much as himself. They can, at least, escape only by creating a new kind of necessity, under the name of contingency; for God is, on this theory, like a mariner who has constantly to shape his course to meet unforeseen and uncontrollable gusts of wind (v. 298); and to make the best of it. He insists upon the difference, not very congenial to his scheme, between ordering and permitting evil. The sun, he says (v. 293), causes light, but is only the occasion of darkness. If, however, the sun voluntarily retired from the world, it could scarcely evade the responsibility of its absence. And, finally, he makes the ordinary dis-

tinction, and that which is perhaps the best answer to be made to an unanswerable difficulty. Christ's crucifixion, he says, was so far bad as it was brought about by malignant murderers; but as considered by God, with a view to all its glorious consequences, it was not evil, but good (v. 297). And thus any action may have two aspects; and that which appears to us, whose view is necessarily limited, as simply evil, may, when considered by an infinite intelligence, as part of the general order of things, be absolutely good. God does not will sin as sin, but as a necessary part of a generally perfect system.

Here, however, in front of that ultimate mystery which occurs in all speculation, I must take leave of this singular thinker. In a frequently quoted passage, Mackintosh speaks of his "power of subtle argument, perhaps unmatched, certainly unsurpassed amongst men." The eulogy seems to be rather overstrained, unless we measure subtlety of thought rather by the complexity and elaboration of its embodiment, than by the keenness of the thought itself. But that Edwards possessed extraordinary acuteness, is as clear as it is singular that so acute a man should have suffered his intellectual activity to be restrained within such narrow fetters. Placed in a different medium, under the same

circumstances, for example, as Hume or Kant, he might have developed a system of metaphysics comparable in its effect upon the history of thought to the doctrines of either of those thinkers. He was, one might fancy, formed by nature to be a German professor, and accidentally dropped into the American forests. Far away from the main currents of speculation, ignorant of the conclusions reached by his most cultivated contemporaries, and deriving his intellectual sustenance chiefly from an obsolete theology, with some vague knowledge of the English followers of Locke, his mind never expanded itself freely. Yet, even after making allowance for his secluded life, we are astonished at the powerful grasp which Calvinism, in its expiring age, had laid upon so penetrating an intellect. The framework of dogma was so powerful, that the explosive force of Edwards' speculations, instead of destroying his early principles by its recoil, expended its whole energy along the line in which orthodox opinion was not injured. Most bold speculators, indeed, suffer from a kind of colour blindness, which conceals from them a whole order of ideas, sufficiently familiar to very inferior minds. Edwards' utter unconsciousness of the aspect which his doctrines would present to any one who should have passed beyond the charmed circle of ortho-

dox sentiment is, however, more surprising than the similar defect in any thinker of nearly equal acuteness. In the middle of the eighteenth century, he is still in bondage to the dogmas of the Pilgrim Fathers; he is as indifferent to the audacious revolt of the deists and Hume as if the old theological dynasty were still in full vigour; and the fact, whatever else it may prove, proves something for the enduring vitality of the ideas which had found an imperfect expression in Calvinism. Clearing away the crust of ancient superstition, we may still find in Edwards' writings a system of morality as ennobling, and a theory of the universe as elevated, as can be discovered in any theology. That the crust was thick and hard, and often revolting in its composition, is, indeed, undeniable; but the genuine metal is there, no less unmistakably than the refuse.

III.

WILLIAM LAW.

THE name of William Law will recall to most readers a passage in Gibbon's autobiography. The cynical historian is thought to have shown little insight into the loftier motives of the early Christians. Yet he spoke with affectionate tenderness of the man who, amongst all his contemporaries, might stand for a primitive Christian come to revisit a strangely altered world. "In our family," says Gibbon, "he left the reputation of a worthy and pious man who believed all that he professed, and practised all that he enjoined." Gibbon's respect for the purity and tenderness of Law's character is mixed with admiration for his intellectual vigour. As a controversialist, according to Gibbon, he showed himself at least the equal of the Whig champion, Hoadly; and in his practical writings, his fervid emotion is seconded by a power of drawing satirical portraits "not unworthy of the pen of La Bruyère."

Were it not for his mysticism, he "might be ranked with the most agreeable and ingenious writers of the times;" and even "a philosopher must allow that he exposes with equal sincerity and truth the strange contradiction which exists between the faith and practice of the Christian world."

Gibbon's autobiography is a very delightful specimen of one of the most generally delightful of all forms of literature. Nobody ever laid bare his own character with more felicity; and there is something curiously dramatic in the contrast between the two men thus brought into momentary contact. Gibbon is as perfect an incarnation of the worldly thinkers of the eighteenth century, with their placid contempt for all the higher spiritual influences, as Law of some counteracting forces which were gradually stirring beneath the surface of society. If we would trace to its head the great reaction against the prevalent sentiments of the time, we must assign a very important place to Law. Johnson, last of the Tories, and deepest of the practical moralists of the age, ascribed his first religious convictions to Law's Serious Call. Wesley, in the period which determined his future career, looked up to Law as his spiritual guide; and though he afterwards admonished his teacher sharply enough,

Law's earlier writings were probably the most important stimulus, as they are the chief literary monument, of the earlier phases of the great religious movement of the century. The life of the teacher is as characteristic as his writings in its strange deviation from the ordinary type. The son of a country grocer, he had obtained a fellowship at Emmanuel in 1711, and became an ardent High Churchman. He seems to have been suspended from his degree for a tripos speech, in which he defended, amongst other things, the objectionable doctrine that the sun shone when it was eclipsed.* The eclipsing body, of course, was taken to be the parliamentary monarchy, and the sun shone with the rays of divine right. At any rate, he refused to take the oaths enforced upon the accession of George I., and thus became one of the second generation of non-jurors. After having thus sacrificed all worldly prospects for a crotchet or a creed, he became the tutor of Gibbon's father, and when his pupil was grown up, remained for some years an inmate of the family.

* If, that is, I am right in identifying him with a "Mr Lawes" mentioned in Hearne's Diary, as quoted in Mr Christopher Wordsworth's interesting book on "Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century." See pp. 40, 231.

In that little circle, though apparently respected by all its members, he found types of the great division between the Church and the world. Two of the portraits in the Call, which represent the worldly and the converted woman, are said by Gibbon to stand for his two aunts. Hester Gibbon, the Miranda of the Call, was to the end of a long life Law's spiritual disciple. Catherine, the Flavia, married a man of fortune, and her daughter, afterwards Lady Eliot, grievously offended her pious aunt Hester by an intimacy with the Mallets—Mallet being that beggarly Scotchman, who, according to Johnson, fired off Bolingbroke's blunderbuss against religion and morality for half-a-crown. A curious correspondence is preserved* between this lady and her aunt:—"If this were the last sentence I should speak," says this spirited young woman, "these would be my words,

* In a book called "Memorials of William Law," privately printed, which consists, for the most part, of an exposition of the doctrines of Jacob Behmen, drawn chiefly from the MSS. of a disciple unfortunately preserved in the British Museum for the bewilderment of ordinary intellects. The author, however, fearing, not irrationally, that his readers may weary of the theosophical quagmires through which they are dragged, inserts a gigantic footnote from p. 334 to p. 628, in which are embedded a few facts about Law's life and a good many letters.

that the aspersion" (that is, Miss Gibbon's aspersion on the Mallets) "is as false as heaven is true;" and Miss Gibbon replied to her rebellious niece in a letter animated with such holy unction, that Law substituted a more courteous document. "Talk not of gratitude to infidel friends," says this softened version, "their friendship is of no better a nature than that which kindly gave thirty pieces of silver to Judas, and both you and your unhappy uncle" (the historian's father) "sooner or later must find that falseness, baseness, and hypocrisy make the whole heart and spirit of every blasphemer of Jesus Christ. It would be a less pain to me or to your deceased friends, whom I have mentioned, to see you attending a dung-cart for the sake of bread, than riding in a coach of your own crowded with beloved infidels." It does not exactly appear how the niece received this vigorous bit of plain speaking, or what Miss Gibbon thought in after years of a certain pair of chapters in a celebrated history. Gibbon, at any rate, could write to her affectionately in her old age. She died in 1790 at the age of eighty-six, and two years earlier she received a letter from the historian, touching with tenderness on the old lady's prejudices. "Your good wishes and advice," he says, "will not, I trust be thrown away on a barren

soil, and, whatever you may have been told of my opinions, I can assure you with truth that I consider religion as the best guide of youth, and the best support of old age, and that I firmly believe there is less real happiness in the business and pleasures of the world than in the life which you have chosen of devotion and retirement." Was there some slight admixture of pious equivocation in these sentiments, or did Gibbon perhaps reflect that middle age is a tolerably elastic period?

The "retirement and devotion" to which Miss Gibbon had dedicated herself had lasted since 1740, about which time she and a rich widow, a Mrs Hutcheson, had taken a house in Law's native village of King's Cliffe. There, with Law for their director, they gave themselves up to the course of devotion and charity described in the "Serious Call." Three times a day the family assembled for prayers and religious exercises. Law himself rose at five, and spent many hours in a little study, four feet square, furnished only with a chair, a writing-table, the Bible, and the works of Jacob Behmen, and a few other mystic writers; and in the words of his biographer, prostrated himself, "body and soul, in abyssal silence, before the interior central throne of the Divine revelation; and, according to his high

supersensual science, presented the now passive, desireless, resigned, mirror-eye of his purified will and intellect to the free, active, gladsome, supercogitative researches of the Spirit of Wisdom and openings of the Divine life." When, descending from these celestial regions, he presented himself at his frugal meals, he could talk pleasantly and fluently; he delighted in playing with children, and could never, we are told, see a bird in a cage without trying to release it. As his controversies pretty plainly show, there was a certain choleric element in the good man, which manifested itself in private life when the soup had not been properly made for distribution to the poor. He took care to taste it himself, and moreover to try on his own person the shirts which were to accompany it. The charitable energies of such a man are not likely to be directed in accordance with the strict rules of political economy. In fact, it seems that King's Cliffe gained so bad a reputation for attracting the idle and worthless, that some of the richer inhabitants protested. The protest, however, dropped when the little household threatened to withdraw themselves and their money. The united incomes of the two ladies amounted to near £3000 a-year, of which much the greatest part was given away. Law himself had founded a school in his

native village by means, as was reported, of a hundred pounds presented to him in gratitude by an anonymous reader of the Call. Fourteen poor girls were to be taught reading, knitting, and needlework. They were to learn the catechism, and to go to church regularly, and to curtsey "to all ancient people, whether rich or poor." Mrs Hutcheson added another school and almshouses; and the superintendence of these foundations appears to have been Law's principal external employment. He died in 1761, at the age of seventy-four, almost in the act of singing a hymn.

Certainly this is a curious picture in the middle of that prosaic eighteenth century which is generally interpreted for us by Fielding, Smollett, and Hogarth; the period of Squire Westerns and Parson Trullibers, and the boisterous humours of ponderous well-fed masses of animated beefsteak. Since the time of the holy Mr Ferrars, commemorated by Izaak Walton, there had been few parallels in the Church of England. The fine gentlemen, the worldly dignitaries, and the coarse, full-fed squires who were scandalised at the obtrusive preaching of his disciple Wesley, could afford to look with compassion upon the gentle quietist and the pair of old ladies who were saying their prayers at King's Cliffe. Here and there some eccentric persons asked

Law's advice in cases of conscience; and a few disciples corresponded with him upon the depths of the divine mysteries. The only one who may deserve a moment's notice, is the poet, shorthand writer, and mystic, John Byrom. Byrom may be still remembered by a few epigrams,* and a poem upon the great fight between Figg and Sutton, which is done into prose in Thackeray's "Virginians." But these rather incongruous performances were only one manifestation for an almost morbid faculty of rhyming, One of his longest so-called poems is a minute piece of scriptural exegesis in answer to Conyers Middleton's interpretation of a particular text. Others propose and discuss emendations in the text of Horace. Four epistles inquire into the exact nature of the miracle on the day of Pentecost, in such verses as these :—

"'Are not these,' said the men (the devout) of each land,
'Galileans that speak? whom we all understand?'

* That, for example, sometimes ascribed to Swift on Handel and Bononcini; and the well-known lines about the King and the Pretender :

"But who Pretender is, or who is King,
God bless us all—that's quite another thing."

Byrom, too, tells the excellent apologue of the "Three Black Crows."—Byrom's journals published by the Chetham Society are amongst the most interesting illustrations of the social characteristics of his day.

As much as to say, by what wonderful powers
Does the tongue Galilean become to us, ours?
Whilst the good were so justly astonished, the bad,
Whose hearts were unopened, cried out, 'They are mad.'
Unaccountable charge, if we do not recall
That, in one single tongue, the apostles spake all."

If these marvellous productions be intentionally semi-facetious, Byrom was perfectly serious in versifying Law's sentiments with a closer fidelity than Pope exerted in turning Bolingbroke's philosophising into poetry. The poem, which is pronounced to be his best, "On Enthusiasm," is simply a fragment from one of Law's works; and people who like their theology done up into neat couplets may read him in place of his original.

Law, however, will be to most tastes the best exponent of his own principles. His masterpiece, "The Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life," which seems to have superseded the similar book on Christian Perfection, may be read with pleasure even by the purely literary critic. Perhaps, indeed, there is a touch of profanity in reading in cold blood a book which throughout palpitates with the deepest emotions of its author, and which has thrilled so many sympathetic spirits. The power can only be adequately felt by readers who can study it on their knees; and those to whom a difference of faith renders that attitude impossible, doubt whether they are

not in a position somewhat resembling that of Mephistopheles in the cathedral. When a man is forced by an overmastering impulse to lay bare his inmost soul, the recipient of the confession should be in harmony with the writer. The creed which is accepted by Law with such unhesitating faith, and enables him to express such vivid emotions, is not mine; and, if I do not infer that respectful silence is the only criticism possible, I admit that any criticism of mine is likely enough to be misappreciative. One who has yielded to the fascination would alone be qualified fully to explain its secret. And yet no one, however far apart from Law's mode of conceiving of the universe, would willingly acknowledge that he was insensible to the thoughts interpreted into his unfamiliar dialect. In one sense, not only the apostles on the day of Pentecost, but all great movers of mankind, speak a universal tongue. Law, indeed, requires a tolerably lax interpretation to be turned to account by a complete outsider; and many within the sacred pale would more or less explicitly disavow his definite conclusions. The dominant idea in each book is the contrast between the Church and the world; or, as we might say, between the morality taught by Jesus of Nazareth and the morality practised by a Walpole or a Warburton. It requires no belief in the supernatural

origin of any religious doctrine to admit the force of much of this teaching. The "world," if the world is the aggregate of petty and selfish motives, is "too much with us, late and soon." The nobler impulses are in constant danger of being stifled under the crust of petty cares and subservience to the meaner social conventions. Not to be galled at times by the harness in which the world drives us, is to be dull to all the finer feelings, and to have a blunted intellect and imagination. But a divergence appears so soon as we attempt to lay down the boundary between the kingdoms of light and darkness. Which are the sentiments that can be rightly cultivated? and which are those that require to be restrained or extirpated? In Law's dialect, which is the divine, and which the carnal element of our lives? As the answer to that question varies, we pass from one end to the other of the scale of moral teaching. Is everything good which is "natural?" and all pleasure, so far as it is pleasant, deserving of cultivation? Or are we to say that every natural impulse is tainted by some mysterious corruption, and that all that the unregenerate man agrees to call pleasant is so much outward show, and turns to ashes in the mouth? Law, one might say, takes the specifically Christian view, were it not that Christian has become one of the vaguest epithets in the

language. It must be added, therefore, that he was one of those peculiar thinkers who refuse to allow a commonplace to lie in a merely dormant state in their minds. Most men blandly accept formulæ which appear to condemn not only their practice but their most settled convictions, either because an illogical state of mind is not painful to them, or because they have tacitly put some conveniently rationalising interpretation upon the familiar words. Law, whose sensitiveness to logic is as marked as his sensitiveness to the voice of conscience, is incapable of any such compromise. He not only believes what he professes, but believes it in the most downright sense, and he is not content till it is thoroughly worked into his whole system of thought. He accepts unhesitatingly the literal meaning even of those expressions which the fairest commentators may take to be intended only as hyperbolical expressions of one aspect of the truth.

The humblest of the contemporary deists, Thomas Chubb, the tallowchandler, succeeded for once in getting into a controversy with a respectable divine. His orthodox antagonist, Dr Stebbing, accused him, in the course of the argument, of suppressing the text in which Christ orders the young man to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. Chubb replied that the

text could hardly be meant literally, or the doctor's conduct would be "very preposterous, who has not only added to those worldly advantages which arise to him from his two livings in Norfolk, and from his being preacher at Gray's Inn, what arises to him from the archdeaconry of Wilts, but is also adding what arises from the chancellorship of the diocese of Sarum." Most divines of that day would have had some difficulty in parrying a thrust of this kind; but against Law it would have been harmless. In the treatise on Christian Perfection, he energetically assails the various devices by which the duty imposed by Christ's command could be represented as of temporary or partial obligation; though he mentions, of course, that the spirit of the command is more important than the letter. If we sincerely humble ourselves we need not be particular as to literal sackcloth and ashes; and it may be right to hold our estates for the good of the poor instead of parting with them; but all that is not distinctly necessary for health is part of that encumbrance which prevents the rich man from entering the narrow gateway of the kingdom of heaven. Good, easy-going divines considered that rules of this inconvenient severity were made exclusively for the early Christians. The Church and the world had become tolerably reconciled. A

strict training was necessary in the early days of warfare; and miracles were required to keep up the spirits of expectant martyrs. But rich livings might now serve the turn. The profession of the Christian faith, as Warburton naïvely remarked, was now attended with ease and honour; patronage would produce quite as much zeal as was necessary or desirable; and why should we reject the good things of the world when they were thus the natural reward of virtue?

Law's logic will admit of no such temporising. The "very soul and essence of Christianity" is the production of a certain temper: that temper must be good now which was good in the first century; then, as now, it can only be gained by systematic mortification and self-denial, and a stern discipline is to the full as necessary to meet the cajolery of the world as to encounter its hostility. Phrases such as these may run glibly enough from the lips of some preachers, who at most consider sackcloth and ashes to be a picturesque dress in the great masquerade of society; but Law applied them with the uncomfortable thoroughness of simple sincerity. All pursuit of money, of power, or of pleasure is vicious when it implies delight in pleasures for their own sake. "Our bodies," he says, "and all bodily pleasures are at one dash struck out of the

account of happiness" by the Christian doctrine. It teaches us that "the whole race of mankind are a race of fallen spirits, that pass through this world as an arrow passes through air" (iii. 37). We are pilgrims who stay here but for an instant, but in that instant we are upon our trial for eternity. Descriptions of earthly pleasures should interest us as little as descriptions of the world in the moon. The honours which a king can give are literally no more than the toys with which a nurse amuses a child. The contrivances which we sacrifice our peace to acquire are as worthless as the staff and money which some nations bury with a corpse. It is no more a hardship upon Christians to be restrained from such pleasures than for a man crossing a river upon a rope to be forbidden to walk in silver shoes, or to look about at the beauty of the waves. From such a point of view most pleasures are positively forbidden, or at best are but playing with forbidden things. Law was ridiculed for the very trenchant application of his maxims to the stage. He summarily declares that it is as unlawful for a Christian to go to a theatre as to be a drunkard, a glutton, or a swearer. "The play-house," he says, "is as certainly the house of the devil as the church is the house of God." The entertainment thus offered is as bad as the worship of

the lewd deities of Paganism, and differs from gladiatorial shows only because Christians are risking their souls as well as their bodies. You should remember that the laughter which you hear there is a laughter among devils, and that you are upon profane ground, and hearing music in the very porch of hell. It is to be feared that the laughter was not quenched by Law's onslaught. To do him justice we must of course remember what was the state of the stage which had provoked Collier's attack; and to confess the truth, I must say that, in spite of all ingenious defences, it seems to me that pruriency and cynicism are the best qualifications for a thorough enjoyment of the Congreve school of comedy. Law, at any rate, took for granted that the one ultimate end and aim of all plays was to stimulate lust and facilitate debauchery. He assumes that, as a matter of fact, all actors and actresses were immoral by profession. "Perhaps you had rather see your son chained to a galley, or your daughter driving a plough, than getting their bread on the stage by administering in so scandalous a manner to the vices and corrupt pleasures of the world." If Law had rightly gauged the contemporary prejudice, he might fairly denounce people who, by their own

showing, paid men and woman to debase themselves for the amusement of their spectators.

Yet Law's logic would scarcely discriminate between the vilest ribaldry of Wycherley and the purest creations of Shakspeare's fancy. What is poetry or art or learning to the divine essence of the soul? "When we are at the top of all human attainments we are at the bottom of all human misery, and have made no further advance towards true happiness than those whom we see in the want of all these excellences. Whether a man die before he has writ poems, compiled histories, or raised an estate, signifies no more than whether he died an hundred or a thousand years ago." If human learning be not bad, and even in his mystical period Law fairly disclaimed an absolute antipathy to it, it is good only in so far as it may be the instrument of the religious emotions. To the outsider it often seems as though the acceptance of such doctrines would fill the deserts with hermits, and gradually depopulate the world. Law, of course, like other ascetics, stops just short of such a conclusion. If virginity, retirement, and a life of mortification be the best, they are not the sole means of cultivating the pure spirit. The world may be condemned, but the world must con-

tinue; and therefore room must be allowed for a certain amount of eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.

No man can free himself from the habits of thought of his time. Little as Law resembles the contemporary essayists and schools, his portraits remind us that he was in fact a contemporary of Addison, Steele, and Swift. Miranda and Flavia and Lucius and Mundanus might, with a little expansion, have made admirable papers in the *Spectator*. If he has not the delicate humour of Addison, he has a vigorous touch, which reminds us more closely of Pope's spirited sketches than of any other writer of the time. Like Pope, he delights in exhibiting the logical inconsistency employed in the ordinary ideals of conduct; and some coincidences in language suggest that Law was amongst the various authors from whom Pope borrowed. "Meat, drink, and clothing are the only things necessary in life," says Law, for example; and Pope wrote a few years later—

> "What riches give us let us then inquire:
> Meat, fire, and clothes—what more? meat, clothes, and fire."

Law's satire, though more serious, is scarcely less pointed than the poet's. His special objects of attack are the Pharisee, who takes the form for the substance,

and the worldling, who forgets the warning, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." There is Calidus, who seems to have anticipated some modern complaints. Every hour is passed in business: his meals are hurried, though hearty, and he would say grace if he had time. He can't get to his tavern till nine, when he drinks a hearty glass to make him sleepy. His prayers are a short ejaculation or two, which he never misses in stormy weather, because he has always something at sea. He tells you that his business would have killed him if he had not made Sunday a day of quiet and refreshment in the country. He is afraid that he would grow melancholy if he gave up business, and says with great gravity that it is a dangerous thing for a man that has been used to get money ever to leave it off. His religious thoughts consist in the reflection that he was never a friend to heretics or infidels, that he has been civil to the clergyman, and has always given something to charity schools. Then we have Flavia—or Miss Gibbon—who is very orthodox, and often takes the sacrament. She has been known to praise a sermon against vanity in dress, and thought that it was very just upon Lucinda. If you ask her for charity, she may perhaps give you a crown, and add that if you knew what a long milliner's bill she had just

paid, you would think it very handsome. The next time she hears a sermon on charity, she congratulates herself on having given a crown when she could so ill spare it. She knows that the poor are cheats and liars, who will say anything to get relief. Her conscience is admirably tender in regard to the guilt of giving amiss. She buys all the books of the wits and poets, for she says that you cannot have a true taste of any without being conversant with all; and she will read a book of piety, if it is short and well written, and she knows where to borrow it. She would be a miracle of piety if she took as much care of her soul as her body; and is as much disturbed as Pope's Silia by the rising of a pimple in her face. You will always find the best company and hear the latest gossip in her house on Sunday: she thinks that only atheists play at cards on that day, but after church she will tell you the details of all the games of the past week, mixed with the latest anecdotes about the bad behaviour of Lucius to his wife. She respects the day, however, so much that she turned a poor old widow out of her house for having once been found mending her clothes on a Sunday night. If she lives thirty years in this way, she will have spent fifteen in bed, and fourteen in eating, drinking, dressing, visiting, reading plays and

romances, and going to the theatre. She will have spent £6000 on herself, and a few odd crowns upon charity. It cannot be said that she will not get to heaven, but she is hardly cultivating the temper which the Gospel declares to be necessary to salvation.

Then we have Fulvius, who is very proud of his conscientious refusal to undertake any duties, and even to be godfather to his nephew, because he is not holy enough in his temper; and Flavus, who tries every variety of amusement, from dress to architecture, and by the last account was going into training to try to rival the wind of a running-footman; and Lucius, who when he is serious studies a treatise upon ancient cookery, and is an enemy to all party-politics, having remarked that there is as good eating amongst Whigs as amongst Tories: he is always ready to drink the King's health, and will never be a rebel, unless there should be a proclamation against eating pheasants' eggs: he denounces the town rakes, and his bitterest saying is that he believes some of them to be so abandoned as not to have a regular meal or a sound night's sleep in a week. Cognatus is a parson, universally respected by the farmers for his judgment in selling corn; and hopes that in spite of the hard times his good management will enable him to leave a fortune to his niece out of

the revenues of his two livings. Mundanus is a profound authority upon trade, who never took up a tool without thinking how it could be improved; but is quite content with the prayers which his mother taught him at six years old. Classicus is an elegant scholar, who knows all the commentators upon Cæsar, Horace, and Ovid, but tells you with great complacency that he will have no other book of devotion but the Holy Scriptures; and Cæcus, a rich man, who can't bear contradiction, and insists upon having the best of everything: but specially plumes himself upon his humility, because he admires it so heartily in his companions.

The predominantly logical character of Law's mind may be noticed in these sketches; and it is perhaps too prominent in writing which appeals rather to the emotions than to the intellect. His exhortations run naturally into the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. If you admit this or that duty, you must admit all; if you must pray to God in words, you must pray by actions; if any earthly pleasure is frivolous, the same rule is equally applicable to all earthly pleasures. There is no logical resting-place between a life devoted exclusively to sensual enjoyments and a life devoted exclusively to spiritual enjoyments. No action or habit is good which is not consciously determined by the desire

to please God. This mode of forcing people to accept one of two horns of a dilemma has the practical disadvantage that it may change a qualified submission into unlimited revolt. To preach that Christianity condemns as equally worthless all intellectual and artistic and worldly and sensual pleasures, is either to force the majority of mankind into a rejection of Christianity, or to force them to challenge the authority of its advocate. By what right, they might say substantially, do you order us to give up all that makes life beautiful and refined? What is the value of your peremptory denunciations of all that our souls delight in? A messenger from heaven may venture into Vanity Fair to order its inhabitants to put on sackcloth and ashes, and raise hermitages on the site of its warehouses; but his credentials should be unmistakeable. Who are you who come hither to turn the world upside down, and ruin the silversmiths and the priests of the great Diana of the Ephesians? To such a challenge Law conceived himself to have a decisive answer; but the answer changed at different periods of his life, and the change explains the development of his religious theories.

The controversies in which he was engaged illustrate this development, and the whole current of contemporary thought. Gibbon and Macaulay have spoken in warm

praise of his argument against Hoadly: and his gladiatorial excellence is equally conspicuous in his assaults upon Mandeville and Tindal. There are very few controversies which give for the moment a clearer impression of decisive victory; and though the impression may grow fainter on reflection, the victory in each case seems to be genuine within certain limits. Law has, in fact, the true fighting instinct. He aims straight at the heart, instead of wasting his powers on irrelevant details. He is perhaps rather too uniformly emphatic. His sentences come out in short vehement paragraphs, and are profusely accented with italics. But the rather abrupt manner has its use. He is always aiming at bringing out the precise point at issue. He condenses the opinion which he opposes into terse epigrammatic sentences, and then casts his own into the parallel form, so that they may, as it were, be accurately measured off against each other. Some pithy illustration is introduced to clench the argument; and we always have the pleasure of witnessing good heavy hitting at half-arm distance, without the troublesome preliminary sparring by which most controversialists weary our patience. We are pretty sure that the first blood will be drawn before we have finished a chapter. If he is sometimes guilty of the common fault of imputing to his antagonists

the logical consequences of their opinions, the interest of the discussion gains for readers to whom the real tendency of arguments is now more interesting than the precise intention of the reasoners. It is a greater fault that he is generally content with pushing his adversaries to an extreme without proving the security of his own position; but the meaning of this will presently appear.

I cannot here go into the Bangorian controversy, in which Law won his first triumphs. The main point at issue, the relations between the spiritual and temporal powers, is certainly not without interest at the present day though the terms in which the problem was then stated have become antiquated, and the whole dispute lost itself in hopeless entanglement. Law, I think, succeeds in convicting Hoadly of inconsistency, and of unsatisfactory attempts to explain away his meaning. He endeavours to pin his antagonist to the doctrines, inconsistent, as he holds, with a genuine belief in Christianity, that all errors of opinion are innocent, that ecclesiastical authority is of purely human origin, and consequently that a State Church is altogether an anomaly. The bishop, he says, has deprived himself of any possible argument against Presbyterians, Quakers, Turks, heretics, or infidels. For my present purpose it is enough to remark that the Church of which Law was

the defender was the external, visible Church marked by the apostolical succession, and divinely empowered to administer sacraments and punish offenders by censures and by spiritual penalties. In fact, it is the ordinary High Church theory; and as Law soon adopted a different view, it is needless to inquire how far Law succeeds in evading Hoadly's main argument, that it is irrational to believe that any fallible man, or body of fallible men, can be empowered to affect the relation of the creature to his Creator.

The controversial writings against Mandeville and Tindal are of more interest. Mandeville has been warmly praised by James Mill; who, as I venture to think, has been too lenient towards some of the more offensive peculiarities of the Fable of the Bees, in consideration of its undeniable acuteness. Mandeville, in fact, represents, in a crude and paradoxical form, the tendencies of Mill's school of utilitarian and empirical philosophy. He attacks the very foundations of the old theological creed. He is the precise antithesis of Law; and gives formal expression to the revolt of the world against the Church naturally provoked by Law's asceticism. He admits, it may be said, the force of Law's dilemma, but accepts its opposite branch. The two writers agree

that everything beyond the strictly necessary is a vicious luxury. Law infers that we should abandon luxury; Mandeville, that we must put up with vice. The true Christian type, they both agree, is represented by the religious orders bound by vows of poverty and chastity. Law infers that we should imitate the spirit of the recluse, though we need not adopt his external mode of life. Mandeville infers that as such a doctrine is radically incompatible with civilisation, it is useless for men, however fit it might be for angels. The consequence of the position is, that Law runs some risk when attacking Mandeville of attacking the theological tenets in some degree common to both. Mandeville is scarcely drawing an illegitimate inference when he says: Human nature, as divines tell us, is corrupt; all actions, then, which result from human nature, are but splendid sins; they are simply modifications of pride or self-love: or, as he puts it, "the political offspring which flattery begat upon pride;" and no action can be meritorious which does not involve a mortification of our nature. Law, it would seem, had said something very like this of the natural man. When he resents the imputation as a libel upon mankind, he might therefore seem to be rather inconsistent. He shows, with his usual excellence

of style,* that Mandeville's doctrine of the invention of virtue is absurd, if not self-contradictory; and that it is as ridiculous to suppose that politicians cheated men into honesty for their own base purposes, as that they cheated them into standing upright. He points out with equal clearness the confusion between merit and self-denial. An action is good because it is in accordance with the Divine law, not because it incidentally involves self-sacrifice. The man is most virtuous whose habits and constitution make him obey the law spontaneously. On such points, Law's victory is conclusive: but it might be doubted whether it were not contradictory to his own tenets. If man be virtuous by nature, what becomes of all his denunciations of nine-tenths of the impulses by which men are habitually actuated? The doctrine, that acts are equally meritorious as a proof of a good habit of mind, whether attained by education or coming from a happy constitution, may be sound; but it is difficult to reconcile with the ecclesiastical theory which Law had previously maintained. A man may deserve well of other men for his virtues, whatever their origin; but how can he deserve well of

* I may venture to refer to my "Essays on Plain Speaking and Free Thinking" for some further remarks upon Mandeville's position.

God, who gave him the good disposition? What right has the pot to claim anything from the potter? Only by help of leaving to man a certain sphere of free-will would it seem possible to leave him any share of merit; and so far as he has received a certain bent from the hands of his Maker, his free-will is limited and his merit an illusion.

The explanation which Law would have given of part at least of the difficulty would have been that there is an equivoque in the word nature. The true nature of man was that which he received before the Fall, when he was made in the image of God. The great catastrophe jarred all his component elements, so that he became incapable of doing good by himself, but yet susceptible to the Divine influence. When touched by grace from above, the existing discords would disappear, and man become fitted to take part in the universal harmony—an instrument responsive to every touch of the supreme hand. But the answer introduces another difficulty. How is this poor shattered wreck, whose instincts have been so hopelessly perverted, whose faculties are so narrowly limited, to distinguish the Divine from the human? Does not all his history show that he mistakes light for darkness, and is misled by every will-o'-the-wisp of an impostor? Are

not the religious annals of the race a mere record of hopeless gropings after truth, from which it results that truth is rigidly unattainable? That was pretty much Mandeville's conclusion, who pronounced the great problem for ever inscrutable, and denied all power of penetrating the secrets of nature. Law, of course, replies that the existence of impostors, so far from proving that there is no truth, proves that there is something genuine to be counterfeited; and some of his language seems to imply that we may trust to the teaching of reason. Virtue, he says, came amongst men as seeing and hearing came amongst them. If the first principles and reasons of morality were not "connatural to us and essential to our minds, there would have been nothing for the moral philosophers to have improved upon." Science is but the improvement of ordinary ways of reasoning; and "morality is but an improvement upon the common reason of men, as eloquence is an improvement upon speech."

It would seem to follow, then, that moral and religious truth must be a body of doctrine attainable by a careful application of the ordinary processes. And yet, has not the jar which disordered our impulses disordered our minds also? If man, as we find him, is corrupt, is he not also imbecile? The point comes

into prominence in Law's attack upon Tindal. Tindal's "Christianity as old as the Creation" marked the culminating point of what may be called the constructive deism; the attempt, that is, to form a pure body of religious truth by abstract reasoning, clear enough to guide human beings, and based upon more solid groundwork than mere historical evidence. Tindal was wholly opposed to Mandeville, in so far as he maintained the possibility of proving such a doctrine by irrefragable demonstration. And yet he was as far removed from Law, for the doctrine so formed would exclude the need of revelation, and he pronounced mysteries to be nonsense, because they could not be discovered by common sense. The vital difference may be said to be that Tindal utterly rejected the doctrine of human corruption which lay at the base of Law's theology—as, indeed, of all genuine theology; whereas Mandeville rejected the doctrine that man could be redeemed from corruption. Man, the metaphysical unit of contemporary thinkers, was inalienably endowed by nature with certain intuitions which would guide him to the truth, and with instincts which would protect him sufficiently against evil without supernatural existences. In attacking this doctrine, Law again coincides with the sceptics. He denies peremptorily the primary postulates of the

religion of nature. The rule of God's actions, says the deist, must be the "fitness of things;" and hence we can determine and discover for ourselves the rules which He has laid down for man. The premiss, says Law, is fatal to the conclusion. If God acts according to His nature, and His nature is perfect and incomprehensible, it follows that our independent knowledge of the divine law must always be partial, and often worthless. Grant that we can discover for ourselves some simple moral rules, the essence of religion consists not in them, but in the statement of man's relations to the inscrutable Creator. It would be as reasonable to make our sensual pleasures the pattern of our enjoyment in heaven, as to make earthly reason the measure of God's dealings with man. To reject the Atonement because we think it needless, is as foolish as to deny that God made us because we don't remember being created. The deist seems to assume that there is a kind of external metaphysical power, called Nature, which binds both God and man. Law "utterly declares against" the opinion. God is the ultimate base of everything, and to derive His wisdom from the "relations of things" is as absurd as to found His knowledge on sensation and reflection. All the talk so popular with the Clarke school about the eternal and inherent

reason of things, is mere "philosophical jargon," which helps people to wrangle away the plain duty of obedience. God is the foundation of all things, and God's nature is infinitely mysterious, not to be planned and measured by our petty foot-rule of earthly demonstration. We are infinitesimal and ephemeral atoms, moving in an abyss of mystery; and whichever way we turn it is but to meet fresh proofs of our own helpless incapacity. All that is left to us is "a bare capacity to be instructed;" we are the creatures of circumstance, as open to good as evil, as liable to be Hottentots amongst the Hottentots as Christians among the Christians. Though philosophy may reach a kind of "after knowledge," when enlightened from above, we are all but "a kind of foolish, helpless animals, till education and experience have revealed to us the wisdom and knowledge of our fellow-creatures;" and we think ourselves too wise to be enlightened by God Almighty, and capable of sitting in judgment upon His revelations! So far from regarding reason as potentially an infallible guide, Law ends by ascribing to it all "the mutability of our tempers, the disorders of our passions, the corruptions of our hearts, all the reveries of the imagination, all the contradictions and absurdities that are to be found in human life."

Is not this to justify a scepticism exceeding the scepticism of Hume? Law seems scarcely to have left room even for a verifying faculty or judgment enough to distinguish between a true and a false revelation. Tindal had argued, in fact, that such a mode of reasoning must reduce us to rely entirely upon the external evidences. If we know nothing of God, we cannot judge whether a revelation is worthy of Him. Law seems to accept the conclusion. He declares that a revelation is to be received as divine, not on account of its "internal excellence, or because we judge it to be worthy of God, but because God has declared it to be His in as plain and undeniable a manner as He has declared reason and providence to be His." Tindal's argument, he says, would lead to atheism; for if we may reject a divine revelation on account of its apparent imperfections, we may on the same grounds reject the divine origin of the world. The remark is the reverse of Butler's argument, and perhaps illustrates its real tendency. Meanwhile, Law finally and explicitly declares that he "appeals to the miracles and prophecies on which Christianity is founded as a sufficient proof that it is a divine revelation."

And here we come to the point upon which Law's intellectual development really turned. His logic had

gradually pushed him into an untenable position. He tried to meet the argument that his method would prove a false as well as a true religion; but he must have felt that the superstructure of his faith was too wide for its base. Standing almost alone against the world, denouncing all its faiths and practices, dictating the utter incapacity of human reason and the corruption of all its impulses, he could appeal to no authority except the historical evidence of certain events which had once happened in Palestine. Many, perhaps most, contemporary theologians took up a similar position, but they were not at such deadly war with the whole existing system. Their religion was a mere set of opinions, which could be dropped without essential injury to their moral theory. But for a man of Law's spiritual depth, such an attitude could not be permanent. In fact, Hume's argument, even if disputable on other grounds, was absolutely unanswerable by that school of theology. If all religious belief is to be based on certain evidence, and if that evidence can only be made apparently satisfactory by abandoning every canon of proof which is applicable in every other case, the belief is simply unreasonable. How should a story prove the existence of God which, if told in any other connection, would

only prove its narrator to be the victim or the author of a lie? Hume's attack can be plausibly evaded only by assigning some independent ground for the belief in a being capable of interfering with the world; and it may be added will, in practice, destroy all belief in the supernatural unless the supernatural is made a part of everyday experience.

Law must have perceived this difficulty; and he certainly felt another which was pressing upon the apologists of the day. The orthodox opponents of deism are often said to have won a complete victory: but two qualifications must be added. The first is, that many of them were deists in all but name, and met their antagonists not by confuting deism, but by the argument that Christianity was the best form of deism. The second is, that every new proof raised a new doubt. A belief need not cease to be operative because it is based on an elaborate demonstration. If the demonstration, as in the case of the physical sciences, is coherent and complete enough to convince all competent students, and enable them to speak with authority, it may govern minds which cannot themselves judge of its merits. But the so-called evidences of Christianity were obviously not of this kind. They involved elaborate historical

investigations, delicate critical considerations, and a careful balancing of evidence, and the study of whole libraries of commentators. And so far from producing unity of opinion, it was plain that the experts were led to every conceivable variety of conclusion. It was already evident, that to order ignorant people, that is to say, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand, to accept one particular conclusion, and to accept it on pain of damnation, was the height of absurdity. A religion, said the deists, which demands universal acceptance, should be written on the skies in letters of light. The orthodox answered as long as the answer was at all plausible, that that was precisely the case with Christianity. They still struggled to maintain their position, partly by extenuating the difficulty of judging the evidence, partly by lowering the terms of salvation. The point was vigorously put in a very clever pamphlet, called "Christianity not founded on Argument," (1742), by Henry Dodwell, son of the learned non-juror. It is one of the best written of the deist pamphlets, and ostensibly argues that, as it was hopeless to convince the vulgar by whole arsenals of learned disquisition, Christianity must rest upon some more direct method, that is, on a divine revelation imparted to each indi-

vidual soul. The author ridicules the notion of imposing upon the ignorant and the infants "a faith built upon syllogisms;" and represents theologians as saying to mankind at large: "Judge whether you have truth or not; judge whether you are judges or not; judge all for yourselves; and yet judge all alike." Some of them are saying it still; and good solid theologians, such as Doddridge and Benson, replied with amusing naïveté that the evidences of Christianity could be made plain to a ploughman or to a child of fourteen. Law, on the other hand, had already accepted in good earnest the doctrine ironically advocated by Dodwell, and this acceptance determined the remainder of his intellectual career.

The ordinary apologists had endeavoured to meet the difficulty by staking the whole of Christianity upon one point—the proof of Christ's resurrection. Law in his later writings says also that deists are to be confuted by reducing Christianity to a single point: that point is the redemption of man from the earthly to the divine; and the proof, lying in each man's consciousness, is altogether independent of internal evidence. "I had frequently a consciousness rising up within me," says a speaker in one of his dialogues, "that the debate was equally vain on both sides, doing no more real

good to one than to the other; not being able to imagine that a set of scholastic, logical opinions about history, facts, doctrines and institutions of the Church, or a set of logical objections against them, were of any significancy towards making the soul of man either an eternal angel of heaven or an eternal devil of hell." Twenty years' experience in this dust of debate had taught him, he says, that the more books were written in defence of the gospel on the ordinary plan, the more new objections were suggested. The change in Law's mind followed soon after his attack upon Tindal. Tindal's book was published in 1730, and Law began his studies of Behmen about 1733. All his later writings are more or less expository of Behmen, or applications of his principles to special questions. The impression was natural. Law shows the mystical temperament even in his earlier writings; he is always ready to withdraw from the external world into rapt contemplation of celestial things, when the fighting instinct is not stirred by some external impulse; and Behmen professed to give him the key to the invisible world, just when he most wanted it. A sufficient authority says that in Behmen we have the "first note of what is specially and peculiarly German philosophy:" it is not easy, he adds, "to find any better expression"

than one of Behmen's "for the main thought of Hegel;" and persons qualified to speak upon such subjects find a close agreement between Behmen and Schelling. It is intelligible, therefore, that Behmen should be to Law what the later German speculation was to men like Coleridge in a succeeding generation. It seemed to him that a new spring of truth was gushing up in the wilderness of arid criticism and futile logomachy. This, however, is not the place to touch even in the briefest manner upon the theological cosmogony which Law derived from his master. I shall say nothing of the glassy sea, of that primary struggle and contrariety from which all materiality is derived, or of the seven resultant properties of nature. Law, it is said, gives a clear exposition of his master's principles, and is a useful guide to a labyrinth which few care to penetrate. But a great part even of Law's later writings expounds doctrines which may be disentangled from this mass of technical phraseology. They strikingly anticipate the teaching of the later school of theology, which traces its origin in England to Coleridge, and has a natural affinity for the mystical element. The chief difference is that in Law their tendency is less obscured by heterogenous elements. Law starts, it may be said, from a conviction of the utter futility of the external evidences

of Christianity, and of the whole theological conception to which they were congenial. Arguments may alter the deist's opinion about facts, but cannot change the state of his soul. We know the fall by our own direct consciousness; and need not go to Moses for it; he does not prove the fact, but only tells us the how and the when. If God were only as good as ourselves, He would have made man better than he is; therefore we have an "infallible demonstration" that we are creatures fallen from a better state. The God whose existence was proved by evidence, was necessarily an external being; and as analysed by metaphysicians, instead of pictured by the spontaneous imagination of mankind, he had gradually become the supernatural chief justice, who administered, and was bound by, the law of nature. Law pointedly repudiates this theory, so popular with his contemporaries, who took the analogy as a literal truth, and arranged the terms of salvation from the precedent of pardons uttered under the great seal. When the subject derives his life and breath from his prince, says Law, pardon can no longer mean a legal transaction, but an inward effect wrought upon his inmost nature. In short, the God who is revealed to us by the heart, is an entirely different being to the God who is built up by external demonstration. He is not the

judge nor the artificer, but the all-pervading and immanent force, from whom all nature is an emanation. We recognise him by a sensibility of our nature which reveals the spiritual world, as the senses reveal the visible world; and reason is an "impotent spectator" which only receives its materials from this supreme faculty. Reason is thus "pulled out of its usurped throne, and shown to be a powerless idle boy, when compared to the royal strength of the heart, which is the kingly power, that has all the government of life in its hands." When the heart thus displaces reason, rightfully or wrongfully, we can tell what God it will recognise. "God is love, yea, all love; and is so all love that nothing but love can come from Him:" and the Christian religion is nothing but an open full manifestation of His universal love towards all mankind." Elsewhere, in language reminding us of another modern formula, we are told that God is only "an eternal will to all goodness." The heart recognises His power as the eye perceives light, or the body feels heat.

Religion, then, with Law becomes subjective and emotional, when to almost all his contemporaries it was historical and rational. A sovereign faculty of intuition sets aside the common sense which they took to be the only judge in all controversies. Or, in

different phrase, the mechanical is superseded by the dynamical view, and we contemplate the forces by which the heart is transformed, not its arbitrary relations to an external being. The most appropriate phrase is, that God acts upon the soul as magnetism upon the needle. "There is nothing in the universe but magnetism and the impediments of it."* In a state of perfection the impediments would disappear, and the whole universe be a harmonious manifestation of this all-pervading force. We see heaven breaking through the veil of the world, wherever there is order and beauty; and hell is to be seen in all discord and wrath, showing that the current has been broken by some mysterious jar. Heaven and hell, therefore, are states actually dividing all our thoughts and actions, not merely a future palace and prison-house. The ordinary theory of the Atonement, "the philosophy of debtor and creditor," of a satisfaction made by Christ to the wrath of God, is a vain fancy of human reason. The atonement is the process by which the jarring elements are brought back to unity; it is the birth of a heavenly life within us, not the settlement of an account by a transference of balances of

* So John Norris calls God "the great and supreme magnet."—"Theory of Love" (1688).

merit. Christ is within us in the sense that His power produces an inward life, as the light of the sun is a force which incorporates itself in a growing plant. The last judgment is not a legal decree, but what may be called the spontaneous arrangement of all things according to the affinities they have manifested, when temporary nature disappears.

The heart thus resembles a needle conscious of the magnetism which moves it, and able to recognise the efficient force instead of the mere superficial change. Newton dealt only with the phenomenal, or, as Law says, only with "facts and references, whose ground is not pretended to be known." But Behmen's divine philosophy has to do with the noumenal, and shows us the ultimate principles from which, for example, Newton's three laws of motion spring. Thus we see the utter vanity of human reason, which Law is so fond of denouncing. It deals with mere appearances instead of realities; and in religion leads us to mere "notional conceptions," instead of opening our eyes to the divine source of light. All the ordinary dogmatic theology belongs to the lower faculty. In the language of a modern school, it does not express God's revelation of Himself to us, but consists of our theories and notions about Him. The letter of the Scriptures is either uncon-

sciously spiritualised, or may be set aside if it conflicts with our intuitions; for a man who is face to face with God can dispense with any of these external wrappings of belief.

Here, then, Law finds a sufficient escape from the superficial controversies of his time; and an unassailable fortress from which to denounce the world and its ways. He has appealed from the intellect to the heart. He gets rid of many revolting theological figments, and forms a coherent, though in its external phraseology at least, a quaint and fanciful system. Whether it has less intrinsic value than some more pretentious systems of later growth, may possibly be doubted. That such a system should be sterile, was of course inevitable. The English soil seems to be averse to mysticism; and in any soil it is a plant of tender growth. Few men can find satisfaction in the cultivation of theopathetic emotions; or sincerely discover that their hearts do in fact teem with those glorious revelations of the dark secret of the universe as excited Law's ecstatic meditations. The church which a man can find in his own bosom turns out to be a church limited by the walls of his hermitage. The system must be adulterated by coarser elements before it can be adapted to ordinary consumption. In Law's

devotional creed we can only expect to find some of the strong wine which gives a flavour to weaker, but more generally acceptable growths. The Wesleyans and Evangelicals, who were most immediately influenced, were, of course, repelled as much as attracted. The philosophy flew above their heads. They loved that popular mythology which seemed to evaporate into mere sentiment in Law's hands. They would not give up their anthropomorphic conceptions of the deity; they loved the "debtor and creditor scheme" which Law scornfully denounced; and feared, not without reason, that the Christ who was said to be within them, would cease to be a historical character at all. Thus the circle of Law's adherents was almost confined to King's Cliffe; and even those who have adapted some of his language in later days, would shrink from the imputation of being in any fuller sense his disciples. The very fact of his unique attitude in the English theology of the time gives him a peculiar interest; and we may admit the singular beauty of his character and much of his moral and religious teaching, though we feel it to be unsound philosophically, and a morbid development in practice.

V.

HORACE WALPOLE.

THE history of England, throughout a very large segment of the eighteenth century, is simply a synonym for the works of Horace Walpole. There are, indeed, some other books upon the subject. Some good stories are scattered up and down the *Annual Register*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and Nichols' *Anecdotes*. There is a speech or two of Burke's not without merit, and a readable letter may be disinterred every now and then from beneath the piles of contemporary correspondence. When the history of the times comes to be finally written in the fashion now prevalent, in which some six portly octavos are allotted to a year, and an event takes longer to describe than to occur, the industrious will find ample mines of waste paper in which they may quarry to their heart's content. Though Hansard was not, and newspapers were in their infancy, the shelves of the British Museum and

other repositories groan beneath mountains of State papers, law reports, pamphlets, and chaotic raw materials, from which some precious ore may be smelted down. But these amorphous masses are attractive chiefly to the philosophers who are too profound to care for individual character, or to those praiseworthy students who would think the labour of a year well rewarded by the discovery of a single fact tending to throw a shade of additional perplexity upon the secret of Junius. Walpole's writings belong to the good old-fashioned type of history, which aspires to be nothing more than the quintessence of contemporary gossip. If the opinion be pardonable in these days, history of that kind has not only its charm, but its serious value. If not very profound or comprehensive, it impresses upon us the fact—so often forgotten—that our grandfathers were human beings. The ordinary historian reduces them to mere mechanical mummies; in Walpole's pages they are still living flesh and blood. Turn over any of the proper decorous history books, mark every passage where, for a moment, we seem to be transported to the past—to the thunders of Chatham, the drivellings of Newcastle, or the prosings of George Grenville, as they sounded in contemporary ears—and it will be safe to say that, on counting

them up, a good half will turn out to be reflections from the illuminating flashes of Walpole. Excise all that comes from him, and the history sinks towards the level of the solid Archdeacon Coxe; add his keen touches, and, as in the *Castle of Otranto*, the portraits of our respectable old ancestors, which have been hanging in gloomy repose upon the wall, suddenly step from their frames, and, for some brief space, assume a spectral vitality.

It is only according to rule that a writer who has been so useful should have been a good deal abused. No one is so amusing and so generally unpopular as a clever retailer of gossip. Yet it does seem rather hard that Walpole should have received such hard measure from Macaulay, through whose pages so much of his light has been transfused. The explanation, perhaps, is easy. Macaulay dearly loved the paradox that a man wrote admirably precisely because he was a fool, and applied it to the two greatest portrait painters of the times—Walpole and Boswell. There is something which hurts our best feelings in the success of a man whom we heartily despise. It seems to imply, which is intolerable, that our penetration has been at fault, or that merit—that is to say, our own conspicuous quality—is liable to be outstripped in this world by imposture.

It is consoling if we can wrap ourselves in the belief that good work can be extracted from bad brains, and that shallowness, affectation, and levity can, by some strange chemistry, be transmuted into a substitute for genius. Do we not all, if we have reached middle age, remember some idiot (of course he was an idiot!) at school or college who has somehow managed to slip past us in the race of life, and revenge ourselves by swearing that he is an idiot still, and that idiocy is a qualification for good fortune? Swift somewhere says that a paper-cutter does its work all the better when it is blunt, and converts the fact into an allegory of human affairs, showing that decorous dulness is an over-match for genius. Macaulay was incapable, both in a good and bad sense, of Swift's trenchant misanthropy. His dislike to Walpole was founded not so much upon posthumous jealousy—though that passion is not so rare as absurd—as on the singular contrast between the character and intellect of the two men. The typical Englishman, with his rough, strong sense, passing at times into the narrowest insular prejudice, detested the Frenchified fine gentleman who minced his mother tongue and piqued himself on cosmopolitan indifference to patriotic sentiment: the ambitious historian was irritated by the

contempt which the dilettante dabbler in literature affected for their common art; and the thorough-going Whig was scandalised by the man who, whilst claiming that sacred name, and living face to face with Chatham and Burke and the great Revolution families in all their glory, ventured to intimate his opinion that they, like other idols, had a fair share of clay and rubbish in their composition, and who, after professing a kind of sham republicanism, was frightened by the French Revolution into a paroxysm of ultra-Toryism. "You wretched fribble!" exclaims Macaulay; "you shallow scorner of all that is noble! You are nothing but a heap of silly whims and conceited airs! Strip off one mask of affectation from your mind, and we are still as far as ever from the real man. The very highest faculty that can be conceded to you is a keen eye for oddities, whether in old curiosity shops or in Parliament; and to that you owe whatever just reputation you have acquired." Macaulay's fervour of rebuke is amusing, though, by a righteous Nemesis, it includes a species of blindness as gross as any that he attributes to Walpole. The summary decision that the chief use of France is to interpret England to Europe, is a typical example of that insular arrogance for which Mr Arnold has popularised the name of Philistinism.

Yet criticism of this one-sided kind has its value. At least it suggests a problem. What is the element left out of account? Folly is never the real secret of a literary reputation, or what noble harvests of genius we should produce! If we patiently take off all the masks we must come at last to the animating principle beneath. Even the great clothes philosophers did not hold that a mere Chinese puzzle of mask within mask could enclose sheer vacancy; there must be some kernel within, which may be discovered by sufficient patience. And in the first place, it may be asked, why did poor Walpole wear a mask at all? The answer seems to be obvious. The men of that age may be divided by a line which, to the philosophic eye, is of far more importance than that which separated Jacobites from loyal Whigs or Dissenters from High Churchmen. It separated the men who could drink two bottles of port after dinner from the men who could not. To men of delicate digestions the test imposed by the jovial party in ascendancy must have been severer than those due to political or ecclesiastical bigotry. They had to choose between social disabilities on the one side, and on the other indigestion for themselves and gout for their descendants. Thackeray, in a truly pathetic passage, partly draws the veil from

their sufferings. Almost all the wits of Queen Anne's reign, he observes, were fat: "Swift was fat; Addison was fat; Gay and Thomson were preposterously fat; all that fuddling and punch-drinking, that club and coffee-house boosing, shortened the lives and enlarged the waistcoats of men of that age." Think of the dinner described, though with intentional exaggeration, in Swift's *Polite Conversation*, and compare the bill of fare with the *menu* of a modern London dinner. The very report of such conviviality—before which Christopher North's performances in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* sink into insignificance—is enough to produce nightmares in the men of our degenerate times, and may help us to understand the peevishness of feeble invalids such as Pope and Lord Hervey in the elder generation, or Walpole in that which was rising. Amongst these Garagantuan consumers, who combined in one the attributes of "gorging Jack and guzzling Jemmy," Sir Robert Walpole was celebrated for his powers, and seems to have owed to them no small share of his popularity. Horace writes piteously from the paternal mansion, to which he had returned in 1743, not long after his tour in Italy, to one of his artistic friends: "Only imagine," he exclaims, "that I here every day see men who are mountains of roast beef, and only seem just roughly hewn out into

outlines of human form, like the giant rock at Pratolino! I shudder when I see them brandish their knives in act to carve, and look on them as savages that devour one another. I should not stare at all more than I do if yonder alderman at the lower end of the table were to stick his fork into his neighbour's jolly cheek, and cut a brave slice of brown and fat. Why, I'll swear I see no difference between a country gentleman and a sirloin; whenever the first laughs or the second is cut, there run out just the same streams of gravy! Indeed, the sirloin does not ask quite so many questions." What was the style of conversation at these tremendous entertainments had better be left to the imagination. Sir R. Walpole's theory on that subject is upon record; and we can dimly guess at the feelings of a delicate young gentleman who had just learnt to talk about Domenichinos and Guidos, and to buy ancient bronzes, when plunged into the coarse society of these mountains of roast beef. As he grew up manners became a trifle more refined, and the customs described so faithfully by Fielding and Smollett belonged to a lower social stratum. Yet we can fancy Walpole's occasional visit to his constituents, and imagine him forced to preside at one of those election feasts which still survive on Hogarth's

canvas. Substitute him for the luckless fine gentleman in a laced coat, who represents the successful candidate in the first picture of the series. A drunken voter is dropping lighted pipe ashes upon his wig; a hideous old hag is picking his pockets; a boy is brewing oceans of punch in a mash-tub; a man is blowing bagpipes in his ear; a fat parson close by is gorging the remains of a haunch of venison; a butcher is pouring gin on his neighbour's broken head; an alderman—a very mountain of roast beef—is sinking back in a fit, whilst a barber is trying to bleed him; brickbats are flying in at the windows; the room reeks with the stale smell of heavy viands and the fresh vapours of punch and gin, whilst the very air is laden with discordant howls and thick with oaths and ribald songs. Only think of the smart young candidate's headache next morning in the days when soda-water was not invented! And remember too that the representatives were not entirely free from sympathy with the coarseness of their constituents. Just at the period of Hogarth's painting, Walpole, when speaking of the feeling excited by a Westminster election, has occasion to use this pleasing "new fashionable proverb"—"We spit in his hat on Thursday, and wiped it off on Friday." It owed its origin

to a feat performed by Lord Cobham at an assembly given at his own house. For a bet of a guinea he came behind Lord Hervey, who was talking to some ladies, and made use of his hat as a spittoon. The point of the joke was that Lord Hervey—son of Pope's "mere white curd of asses' milk," and related, as the scandal went, rather too closely to Horace Walpole himself—was a person of effeminate appearance, and therefore considered unlikely—wrongly, as it turned out—to resent the insult. We may charitably hope that the assailants, who thus practically exemplified the proper mode of treating milksops, were drunk. The two-bottle men who lingered till our day were surviving relics of the type which then gave the tone to society. Within a short period there was a prime minister who always consoled himself under defeats and celebrated triumphs with his bottle; a chancellor who abolished evening sittings on the ground that he was always drunk in the evening; and even an archbishop—an Irish archbishop, it is true—whose jovial habits broke down his constitution. Scratch those jovial toping aristocrats, and you everywhere find the Squire Western. A man of squeamish tastes and excessive sensibility jostled amongst that thick-skinned, iron-nerved generation, was in a position with which

any one may sympathise who knows the sufferings of a delicate lad at a public school in the old (and not so very old) brutal days. The victim of that tyranny slunk away from the rough horseplay of his companions to muse, like Dobbin, over the "Arabian Nights" in a corner, or find some amusement which his tormentors held to be only fit for girls. So Horace Walpole retired to Strawberry Hill and made toys of Gothic architecture, or heraldry, or dilettante antiquarianism. The great discovery had not then been made, we must remember, that excellence in field-sports deserved to be placed on a level with the Christian virtues. The fine gentlemen of the Chesterfield era speak of fox-hunting pretty much as we speak of prize-fighting and bull-baiting. When all manly exercises had an inseparable taint of coarseness, delicate people naturally mistook effeminacy for refinement. When you can only join in male society on pain of drinking yourself under the table, the safest plan is to retire to tea-tables and small talk. For many years, Walpole's greatest pleasure seems to have been drinking tea with Lady Suffolk, and carefully piecing together bits of scandal about the courts of the first two Georges. He tells us, with all the triumph of a philosopher describing a brilliant scientific induction, how he was

sometimes able, by adding his bits of gossip to hers, to unravel the secret of some wretched intrigue which had puzzled two generations of quidnuncs. The social triumphs on which he most piqued himself were of a congenial order. He sits down to write elaborate letters to Sir Horace Mann, at Florence, brimming over with irrepressible triumph when he has persuaded some titled ladies to visit his pet toy, the printing-press, at Strawberry Hill, and there, of course to their unspeakable surprise, his printer draws off a copy of verses composed in their honour in the most faded style of old-fashioned gallantry. He is intoxicated by his appointment to act as poet-laureate on the occasion of a visit of the Princess Amelia to Stowe. She is solemnly conducted to a temple of the Muses and Apollo, and there finds one of his admirable effusions,—

> "T'other day with a beautiful frown on her brow,
> To the rest of the gods said the Venus of Stowe:"

and so on. "She was really in Elysium," he declares, and visited the arch erected in her honour three or four times a day.

It is not wonderful, we must confess, that burly ministers and jovial squires laughed horse-laughs at this mincing dandy, and tried in their clumsy fashion to

avenge themselves for the sarcasms which, as they instinctively felt, lay hid beneath this mask of affectation. The enmity between the lapdog and the mastiff is an old story. Nor, as we must confess again, were these tastes, redeemed by very amiable qualities beneath the smooth external surface. There was plenty of feminine spite as well as feminine delicacy. To the marked fear of ridicule natural to a sensitive man, Walpole joined a very happy knack of quarrelling. He could protrude a feline set of claws from his velvet glove. He was a touchy companion and an intolerable superior. He set out by quarrelling with Gray, who, as it seems, could not stand his dandified airs of social impertinence, though it must be added in fairness that the bond which unites fellow-travellers is, perhaps, the most trying known to humanity. He quarrelled with Mason after twelve years of intimate correspondence; he quarrelled with Montagu after a friendship of some forty years; he always thought that his dependants, such as Bentley, were angels for six months, and made their lives a burden to them afterwards; he had a long and complex series of quarrels with all his near relations. Sir Horace Mann escaped any quarrel during forty-five years of correspondence; but Sir Horace never left Florence and Walpole never reached it.

Conway alone remained intimate and immaculate to the end, though there is a bitter remark or two in the Memoirs against the perfect Conway. With ladies, indeed, Walpole succeeded better; and perhaps we may accept, with due allowance for the artist's point of view, his own portrait of himself. He pronounces himself to be a "boundless friend, a bitter but placable enemy." Making the necessary corrections, we should translate this into "a bitter enemy, a warm but irritable friend." Tread on his toes, and he would let you feel his claws, though you were his oldest friend; but so long as you avoided his numerous tender points, he showed a genuine capacity for kindliness and even affection; and in his later years he mellowed down into an amiable, purring old gentleman, responding with eager gratitude to the caresses of the charming Miss Berrys. Such a man, skinless and bilious, was ill qualified to join in the rough game of politics. He kept out of the arena while the hardest blows were given and taken, and confined his activity to lobbies and backstairs, where scandal was to be gathered and the hidden wires of intrigue to be delicately manipulated. He chuckles irrepressibly when he has confided a secret to a friend, who has let it out to a minister, who communicates it to a great personage, who ex-

plodes into inextinguishable wrath, and blows a whole elaborate plot into a thousand fragments. To expect deep and settled political principle from such a man would be to look for grapes from thorns and figs from thistles; but to do Walpole justice, we must add that it would be equally absurd to exact settled principle from any politician of that age. We are beginning to regard our ancestors with a strange mixture of contempt and envy. We despise them because they cared nothing for the thoughts which for the last century have been upheaving society into strange convulsions; we envy them because they enjoyed the delicious calm which was the product of that indifference. Wearied by the incessant tossing and boiling of the torrent which carries us away, we look back with fond regret to the little backwater so far above Niagara, where scarcely a ripple marks the approaching rapids. There is a charm in the great solid old eighteenth century mansions, which London is so rapidly engulphing, and even about the old red brick churches with "sleep-compelling" pews. We take imaginary naps amongst our grandfathers with no railways, no telegraphs, no mobs in Trafalgar Square, no discussions about ritualism or Dr Colenso, and no reports of parliamentary debates. It is to our fancies an "island valley of Avilion," or,

less magniloquently, a pleasant land of Cockaine, where we may sleep away the disturbance of battle, and even read through "Clarissa Harlow." We could put up with an occasional highwayman in Hyde Park, and perhaps do not think that our comfort would be seriously disturbed by a dozen executions in a morning at Tyburn. In such visionary glances through the centuries we have always the advantage of selecting our own position in life, and perhaps there are few that for such purposes we should prefer to Walpole's. We should lap ourselves against eating cares in the warm folds of a sinecure of £6000 a-year bestowed because our father was a Prime Minister. There are many immaculate persons at the present day to whom truth would be truth even when seen through such a medium. There are—we have their own authority for believing it—men who would be republicans, though their niece was married to a royal duke. Walpole, we must admit, was not of the number. He was an aristocrat to the backbone. He was a gossip by nature and education, and had lived from infancy in the sacred atmosphere of court intrigue; every friend he possessed in his own rank either had a place, or had lost a place, or was in want of a place, and generally combined all three characters; professed indifference to place was only a

cunning mode of angling for a place, and politics was a series of ingeniously-contrived manœuvres in which the moving power of the machinery was the desire of sharing the spoils. Walpole's talk about Magna Charta and the execution of Charles I. could, it is plain, imply but a skin-deep republicanism. He could not be seriously displeased with a state of things of which his own position was the natural outgrowth. His republicanism was about as genuine as his boasted indifference to money—a virtue which is not rare in bachelors who have more than they can spend. So long as he could buy as much bricabrac, as many knicknacks, and old books and bronzes and curious portraits and odd gloves of celebrated characters, as he pleased; add a new tower and a set of battlements to Strawberry Hill every few years; keep a comfortable house in London, and have a sufficiency of carriages and horses; treat himself to an occasional tour, and keep his press steadily at work; he was not the man to complain of poverty. He was a republican, too, as long as that word implied that he and his father and uncles and cousins and connections by marriage and their intimate friends were to have everything precisely their own way; but if a vision could have shown him the reformers of a coming generation who would inquire into civil lists and object

to sinecures—to say nothing of cutting off the heads of the first families—he would have prayed to be removed before the evil day. Republicanism in his sense was a word exclusive of revolution. Was it, then, a mere meaningless mask intended only to conceal the real man? Before passing such a judgment we should remember that the names by which people classify their opinions are generally little more than arbitrary badges; and even in these days, when practice treads so closely on the heels of theory, some persons profess to know extreme radicals who could be converted very speedily by a bit of riband. Walpole has explained himself with unmistakeable frankness, and his opinion was at least intelligible. He was not a republican after the fashion of Robespierre, or Jefferson, or M. Gambetta; but he had some meaning. When a duke in those days proposed annual parliaments and universal suffrage, we may assume that he did not realise the probable effect of those institutions upon dukes; and when Walpole applauded the regicides, he was not anxious to send George III. to the block. He meant, however, that he considered George III. to be a narrow-minded and obstinate fool. He meant, too, that the great Revolution families ought to distribute the plunder and the power without interference from the

Elector of Hanover. He meant, again, that as a quick and cynical observer, he found the names of Brutus and Algernon Sydney very convenient covers for attacking the Duke of Newcastle and the Earl of Bute. But beyond all this, he meant something more, which gives the real spice to his writings. It was something not quite easy to put into formulas; but characteristic of the vague discomfort of the holders of sinecures in those halcyon days arising from the perception that the ground was hollow under their feet. To understand him we must remember that the period of his activity marks precisely the lowest ebb of political principle. Old issues had been settled, and the new ones were only just coming to the surface. He saw the end of the Jacobites and the rise of the demagogues. His early letters describe the advance of the Pretender to Derby; they tell us how the British public was on the whole inclined to look on and cry, "Fight dog, fight bear;" how the Jacobites who had anything to lose left their battle to be fought by half-starved cattle-stealers, and contented themselves with drinking to the success of the cause; and how the Whig magnates, with admirable presence of mind, raised regiments, appointed officers, and got the expenses paid by the Crown. His later letters describe the amazing

series of blunders by which we lost America in spite of the clearest warnings from almost every man of sense in the kingdom. The interval between these disgraceful epochs is filled—if we except the brief episode of Chatham—by a series of struggles between different connections—one cannot call them parties—which separate and combine, and fight and make peace, till the plot of the drama becomes too complicated for human ingenuity to unravel. Lads just crammed for a civil service examination might possibly bear in mind all the shifting combinations which resulted from the endless intrigues of Pelhams and Grenvilles and Bedfords and Rockinghams; yet even those omniscient persons could hardly give a plausible account of the principles which each party conceived itself to be maintaining. What, for example, were the politics of a Rigby or a Bubb Dodington? The diary in which the last of these eminent persons reveals his inmost soul is perhaps the most curious specimen of unconscious self-analysis extant. His utter baseness and venality, his disgust at the "low venal wretches" to whom he had to give bribes; his creeping and crawling before those from whom he sought to extract bribes; his utter incapacity to explain a great man except on the hypothesis of insanity; or to understand that there is

such a thing as political morality, derive double piquancy from the profound conviction that he is an ornament to society, and from the pious aspirations which he utters with the utmost simplicity. Bubb wriggled himself into a peerage, and differed from innumerable competitors only by superior frankness. He is the fitting representative of an era from which political faith has disappeared, as Walpole is its fitting satirist. All political virtue, it is said, was confined, in Walpole's opinion, to Conway and the Marquis of Hertford. Was he wrong? or, if he was wrong, was it not rather in the exception than the rule? The dialect in which his sarcasms are expressed is affected, but the substance is hard to dispute. The world, he is fond of saying, is a tragedy to those who feel, a comedy to those who think. He preferred the comedy view. "I have never yet seen or heard," he says, "anything serious that was not ridiculous. Jesuits, Methodists, philosophers, politicians, the hypocrite Rousseau, the scoffer Voltaire, the encyclopedists, the Humes, the Lytteltons, the Grenvilles, the atheist tyrant of Prussia, and the mountebank of history, Mr Pitt, are all to me but impostors in their various ways. Fame or interest is their object, and after all their parade, I think a ploughman who sows, reads his almanack, and believes that the stars are so

many farthing candles created to prevent his falling into a ditch as he goes home at night, a wiser and more rational being, and I am sure an honester, than any of them. Oh! I am sick of visions and systems that shove one another aside, and come again like figures in a moving picture." Probably Walpole's belief in the ploughman lasted till he saw the next smock-frock; but the bitterness clothed in the old-fashioned cant is serious and is justifiable enough. Here is a picture of English politics in the time of Wilkes. "No government, no police, London and Middlesex distracted, the colonies in rebellion, Ireland ready to be so, and France arrogant and on the point of being hostile! Lord Bute accused of all, and dying of a panic; George Grenville wanting to make rage desperate; Lord Rockingham and the Cavendishes thinking we have no enemies but Lord Bute, and that five mutes and an epigram can set everything to rights; the Duke of Grafton (then Prime Minister) like an apprentice, thinking the world should be postponed to a horse-race; and the Bedfords not caring what disgraces we undergo while each of them has £3000 a year and three thousand bottles of claret and champagne!" And every word of this is true—at least, so far as epigrams need be true. It is difficult to put

into more graphic language the symptoms of an era just ripe for revolution. If frivolous himself, Walpole can condemn the frivolity of others. "Can one repeat common news with indifference," he asks, just after the surrender of Yorktown, "while our shame is writing for future history by the pens of all our numerous enemies? When did England see two whole armies lay down their arms and surrender themselves prisoners? . . . These are thoughts I cannot stifle at the moment that expresses them; and, though I do not doubt that the same dissipation that has swallowed up all our principles will reign again in ten days with its wonted sovereignty, I had rather be silent than vent my indignation. Yet I cannot talk, for I cannot think, on any other subject. It was not six days ago that, in the height of four raging wars (with America, France, Spain, and Holland), I saw in the papers an account of the opera and of the dresses of the company, and hence the town, and thence, of course, the whole nation, were informed that Mr Fitzpatrick had very little powder in his hair." Walpole sheltered himself behind the corner of a pension to sneer at the tragi-comedy of life; but if his feelings were not profound, they were quick and genuine, and, affectation for affectation, his cynical coxcombry seems preferable to the solemn

coxcombry of the men who shamelessly wrangled for plunder, whilst they talked solemn platitudes about sacred Whig principles and the thrice blessed British Constitution.

Walpole, in fact, represents a common creed amongst comfortable but clear-headed men of his time. It was the strange mixture of scepticism and conservatism which is exemplified in such men as Hume and Gibbon. He was at heart a Voltairian, and, like his teacher, confounded all religions and political beliefs under the name of superstition. Voltaire himself did not anticipate the Revolution to which he, more than any man, had contributed. Walpole, with stronger personal reasons than Voltaire for disliking a catastrophe, was as furious as Burke when the volcano burst forth. He was a republican so far as he disbelieved in the divine right of kings, and hated enthusiasm and loyalty generally. He wished the form to survive and the spirit to disappear. Things were rotten, and he wished them to stay rotten. The ideal to which he is constantly recurring was the pleasant reign of his father, when nobody made a fuss, or went to war, or kept principles except for sale. He foresaw, however, far better than most men, the coming crash. If political sagacity be fairly tested by a prophetic vision of the

French Revolution, Walpole's name should stand high. He visited Paris in 1765, and remarks that laughing is out of fashion. "Good folks, they have no time to laugh. There is God and the King to be pulled down first, and men and women, one and all, are devoutly employed in the demolition. They think me quite profane for having any belief left." Do you know, he asks presently, who are the philosophers? "In the first place, it comprehends almost everybody, and in the next it means men who, avowing war against Papacy, aim, many of them, at the destruction of regal power. The philosophers," he goes on, "are insupportable, superficial, overbearing, and fanatic. They preach incessantly, and their avowed doctrine is atheism—you could not believe how openly. Don't wonder, therefore, if I should return a Jesuit. Voltaire himself does not satisfy them. One of their lady devotees said of him, '*Il est bigot, c'est un déiste!*'" French politics, he professes a few years afterwards, must end in "despotism, a civil war, or assassination," and he remarks that the age will not, as he had always thought, be an age of abortion, but rather "the age of seeds that are to produce strange crops hereafter." The next century, he says at a later period, "will probably exhibit a very new era, which the close of

this has been, and is, preparing." If these sentences had been uttered by Burke, they would have been quoted as proofs of remarkable sagacity. As it is, we may surely call them shrewd glances for a frivolous coxcomb.

Walpole regarded these symptoms in the true epicurean spirit, and would have joined in the sentiment, *après moi le déluge.* He was, on the whole, for remedying grievances, and is put rather out of temper by cruelties which cannot be kept out of his sight. He talks with disgust of the old habit of stringing up criminals by the dozen; he denounces the slave-trade with genuine fervour; there is apparent sincerity in his platitudes against war; and he never took so active a part in politics as in the endeavour to prevent the judicial murder of Byng. His conscience generally discharged itself more easily by a few pungent epigrams, and though he wished the reign of reason and humanity to dawn, he would rather that it should not come at all than be ushered in by a tempest. His whole theory is given forcibly and compactly in an answer which he once made to the republican Mrs Macaulay, and was fond of repeating:—"Madam, if I had been Luther, and could have known that for the *chance* of saving a million

of souls I should be the cause of a million of lives, at least, being sacrificed before my doctrines could be established, it must have been a most palpable angel, and in a most heavenly livery, before he should have set me at work." We will not ask what angel would have induced him to make the minor sacrifice of six thousand a year to establish any conceivable doctrine. Whatever may be the merit of these opinions, they contain Walpole's whole theory of life. I know, he seems to have said to himself, that loyalty is folly, that rank is contemptible, that the old society in which I live is rotten to the core, and that explosive matter is accumulating beneath our feet. Well! I am not made of the stuff for a reformer: I am a bit of a snob, though, like other snobs, I despise both parties to the bargain. I will take the sinecures the gods provide me, amuse myself with my toys at Strawberry Hill, despise kings and ministers, without endangering my head by attacking them, and be over-polite to a royal duke when he visits me on condition of laughing at him behind his back when he is gone. Walpole does not deserve a statue; he was not a Wilberforce or a Howard, and as little of a Burke or a Chatham. But his faults, as well as his virtues, qualified him to be the keenest of all observers

of a society unconsciously approaching a period of tremendous convulsions.

To claim for him that, even at his best, he is a profound observer of character, or that he gives any consistent account of his greatest contemporaries, would be too much. He is full of whims, and moreover, full of spite. He cannot be decently fair to any one who deserted his father, or stood in Conway's light. He reflects at all times the irreverent gossip current behind the scenes. To know the best and the worst that can be said of any great man, the best plan is to read the leading article of his party newspaper, and then to converse in private with its writer. The eulogy and the sarcasm may both be sincere enough; only it is pleasant, after puffing one's wares to the public, to glance at their seamy side in private. Walpole has a decided taste for that last point of view. The littleness of the great, the hypocrisy of the virtuous, and the selfishness of statesmen in general, is his ruling theme, illustrated by an infinite variety of brilliant caricatures struck off at the moment with a quick eye and a sure hand. Though he elaborates no grand historical portrait, like Burke or Clarendon, he has a whole gallery of telling vignettes which are often as significant as far more pretentious works.

Nowhere, for example, can we find more graphic sketches of the great man who stands a head and shoulders above the whole generation of dealers in power and place. Most of Chatham's contemporaries repaid his contempt with intense dislike. Some of them pronounced him mad, and others thought him a knave. Walpole, who at times calls him a mountebank and an impostor, does not go further than Burke, who, in a curious comment, speaks of him as the "grand artificer of fraud," who never conversed but with "a parcel of low toadeaters;" and asks whether all this "theatrical stuffing" and these "raised heels" could be necessary to the character of a great man. Walpole, of course, has a keen eye to the theatrical stuffing. He takes the least complimentary view of the grand problem, which still puzzles some historians, as to the genuineness of Chatham's gout. He smiles complacently when the great actor forgets that his right arm ought to be lying helpless in a sling and flourishes it with his accustomed vigour. But Walpole, in spite of his sneers and sarcasms, can recognise the genuine power of the man. He is the describer of the striking scene which occurred when the House of Commons was giggling over some delicious story of bribery and corruption—the House of Commons was

frivolous in those benighted days; he tells how Pitt suddenly stalked down from the gallery and administered his thundering reproof; how Murray, then Attorney-General, "crouched, silent and terrified," and the Chancellor of the Exchequer faltered out a humble apology for the unseemly levity. It is Walpole who best describes the great debate when Pitt, "haughty, defiant, conscious of injury and supreme abilities," burst out in that tremendous speech—tremendous if we may believe the contemporary reports, of which the only tolerably preserved fragment is the celebrated metaphor about the confluence of the Rhone and the Saone. Alas! Chatham's eloquence has all gone to rags and tatters; though, to say the truth, it has only gone the way of nine-tenths of our contemporary eloquence. We have indeed what are called accurate reports of spoken pamphlets, dried specimens of rhetoric from which the life has departed as completely as it is strained out of the specimens in a botanical collection. If there is no Walpole amongst us, we shall know what our greatest living orator has said; but how he said it, and how it moved his audience, will be as obscure as if the reporters' gallery was still unknown. Walpole—when he was not affecting philosophy, or smarting from the failure of an intrigue,

or worried by the gout, or disappointed of a bargain at a sale—could throw electric flashes of light on the figure he describes which reveal the true man. He errs from petulancy, but not from stupidity. He can appreciate great qualities by fits, though he cannot be steadily loyal to their possessor. And if he wrote down most of our rulers as knaves and fools, we have only to lower those epithets to selfish and blundering, to get a very fair estimate of their characters. To the picturesque historian his services are invaluable; though no single statement can be accepted without careful correction.

Walpole's social, as distinguished from his political, anecdotes do in one sense what Leech's drawings have done for this. But the keen old man of the world puts a far bitterer and deeper meaning into his apparently superficial scratches than the kindly modern artist, whose satire was narrowed, if purified, by the decencies of modern manners. Walpole reflects in a thousand places that strange combination of brutality and polish which marked the little circle of fine ladies and gentlemen who then constituted society, and played such queer pranks in quiet unconsciousness of the revolutionary elements that were seething below. He is the best of commentators on Hogarth, and gives us "Gin Lane" on one side and the "Marriage à la

mode" on the other. As we turn over the well-known pages we come at every turn upon characteristic scenes of the great tragi-comedy that was being played out. In one page a highwayman puts a bullet through his hat, and on the next we read how three thousand ladies and gentlemen visited the criminal in his cell, on the Sunday before his execution, till he fainted away twice from the heat; then we hear how Lord Lovat's buffooneries made the whole brilliant circle laugh as he was being sentenced to death; and how Balmerino pleaded "not guilty," in order that the ladies might not be deprived of their sport; how the House of Commons adjourned to see a play acted by persons of quality, and the gallery was hung round with blue ribands; how the Gunnings had a guard to protect them in the park; what strange pranks were played by the bigamous Miss Chudleigh; what jokes —now, alas! very faded and dreary—were made by George Selwyn, and how that amiable favourite of society went to Paris in order to see the cruel tortures inflicted upon Damiens, and was introduced to the chief performer on the scaffold as a distinguished amateur in executions. One of the best of all these vignettes portrays the funeral of George II., and is a worthy pendant to Lord Hervey's classic account

of the queen's death. It opens with the solemn procession to the torch-lighted Abbey, whose "long-drawn aisles and fretted vault" excite the imagination of the author of the "Castle of Otranto." Then the comic element begins to intrude; the procession jostles and falls into disorder at the entrance of Henry Seventh's Chapel; the bearers stagger under the heavy coffin and cry for help; the bishop blunders in the prayers, and the anthem, as fit, says Walpole, for a wedding as a funeral, becomes immeasurably tedious. Against this tragi-comic background are relieved two characteristic figures. The "butcher" Duke of Cumberland, the hero of Culloden, stands with the obstinate courage of his race gazing into the vault where his father is being buried, and into which he is soon to descend. His face is distorted by a recent stroke of paralysis, and he is forced to stand for two hours on a bad leg. To him enters the burlesque Duke of Newcastle, who begins by bursting into tears and throwing himself back in a stall whilst the Archbishop "hovers over him with a smelling-bottle." Then curiosity overcomes him, and he runs about the chapel with a spyglass in one hand to peer into the faces of the company, and mopping his eyes with the other. "Then returned the fear of catching cold; and the Duke of Cumberland,

who was sinking with heat, felt himself weighed down, and turning round found it was the Duke of Newcastle standing upon his train to avoid the chill of the marble." What a perch to select! Imagine the contrast of the two men, and remember that the Duke of Newcastle was for an unprecedented time the great dispenser of patronage, and so far the most important personage in the government. Walpole had reason for some of his sneers.

The literary power implied in these brilliant sketches is remarkable, and even if Walpole's style is more Gallicised than is evident to me, it must be confessed that with a few French idioms he has caught something of that unrivalled dexterity and neatness of touch in which the French are our undisputed masters. His literary character is of course marked by an affectation analogous to that which debases his politics. Walpole was always declaring with doubtful sincerity—(that is one of the matters in which a man is scarcely bound to be quite sincere)—that he has no ambition for literary fame, and that he utterly repudiates the title of "learned gentleman." There is too much truth in his disavowals to allow us to write them down as mere mock-modesty; but doubtless his principal motive was a dislike to entering the arena of open

criticism. He has much of the feeling which drove Pope into paroxysms of unworthy fury on every mention of Grub Street. The anxiety of men in that day to disavow the character of professional authors, must be taken with the fact that professional authors were then an unscrupulous, scurrilous, and venal race. Walpole feared collision with them as he feared collision with the "mountains of roast beef." Though literature was emerging from the back lanes and alleys, the two greatest potentates of the day, Johnson and Warburton, had both a decided cross of the bear in their composition. Walpole was nervously anxious to keep out of their jurisdiction, and to sit at the feet of such refined lawgivers as Mason and Grey, or the feebler critics of polite society. In such courts there naturally passes a good deal of very flimsy flattery between persons who are alternately at the bar or on the bench. We do not quite believe that Lady Di Beauclerk's drawings were unsurpassable by "Salvator Rosa and Guido," or that Lady Ailesbury's "landscape in worsteds" was a work of high art; and we doubt whether Walpole believed it; nor do we fancy that he expected Sir Horace Mann to believe that when sitting in his room at Strawberry Hill, he was in the habit of apostrophising the setting sun in such terms as

these: "Look at yon sinking beams! His gaudy reign is over; but the silver moon above that elm succeeds to a tranquil horizon," &c. Sweeping aside all this superficial rubbish, as a mere concession to the faded taste of the age of hoops and wigs, Walpole has something to say for himself. He has been condemned for the absurdity of his criticisms, and it is undeniable that he sometimes blunders strangely. It would, indeed, be easy to show, were it worth while, that he is by no means so silly in his contemporary verdicts as might be supposed from scattered passages in his letters. But what are we to say to a man who compares Dante to "a Methodist parson in Bedlam?" The first answer is that, in this instance Walpole was countenanced by greater men. Voltaire, with all his faults the most consummate literary artist of the century, says with obvious disgust that there are people to be found who force themselves to admire "feats of imagination as stupidly extravagant and barbarous" as those of the Divina Commedia. Walpole must be reckoned as belonging both in his faults and his merits to the Voltairian school of literature, and amongst other peculiarities common to the master and his disciple, may be counted an

incapacity for reverence and an intense dislike to being bored. For these reasons he hates all epic poets, from Dante to Blackmore; he detests all didactic poems, including those of Thomson and Akenside; and he is utterly scandalised by the French enthusiasm for Richardson. In these last judgments, at least nine-tenths of the existing race of mankind agree with him; though few people have the courage to express their agreement in print. We may be thankful that Walpole, which is not always the case, is as incapable of boring as of enduring bores. He is one of the few Englishmen who share the quality sometimes ascribed to the French as a nation, and certainly enjoyed by his teacher, Voltaire; namely, that though they may be frivolous, blasphemous, indecent, and faulty in every other way, they can never for a single moment be dull. His letters show that crisp, sparkling quality of style which accompanies this power, and which is so unattainable to most of his countrymen. The quality is less conspicuous in the rest of his works, and the light verses and essays in which we might expect him to succeed are disappointingly weak. Xoho's letter to his countrymen is now as dull as the work of most imaginary travellers, and the essays in "The World" are remark-

ably inferior to the "Spectator," to say nothing of the "Rambler." * Yet Walpole's place in literature is unmistakable, if of equivocal merit. Byron called him the author of the last tragedy and the first romance in our language. The tragedy, with Byron's leave, is revolting (perhaps the reason why Byron admired it), and the romance passes the borders of the burlesque. And yet the remark hits off a singular point in Walpole's history. A thorough child of the eighteenth century, we might have expected him to share Voltaire's indiscriminating contempt for the Middle Ages. One would have supposed that in his lips, as in those of all his generation, Gothic would have been synonymous with barbaric, and the admiration of an ancient abbey as ridiculous as admiration of Dante. So far from which, Walpole is almost the first modern Englishman who found out that our old cathedrals were really beautiful. He discovered that a most charming toy might be made of mediævalism. Strawberry Hill, with all its gimcracks, its pasteboard battlements, and stained-paper carvings, was the lineal ancestor of the new law-courts. The restorers of churches, the manufacturers of stained

* It is odd that in one of these papers Walpole proposes, in jest, precisely our modern system of postage cards, only charging a penny instead of a halfpenny.

glass, the modern decorators and architects of all vanities, the Ritualists and the High Church party, should think of him with kindness. It cannot be said that they should give him a place in their calendar, for he was not of the stuff of which saints are made. It was a very thin veneering of mediævalism which covered his modern creed; and the mixture is not particularly edifying. Still he undoubtedly found out that charming plaything which, in other hands, has been elaborated and industriously constructed till it is all but indistinguishable from the genuine article. We must hold, indeed, that it is merely a plaything, when all has been said and done, and maintain that when the root has once been severed, the tree can never again be made to grow. Walpole is so far better than some of his successors, that he did not make a religion out of these flimsy materials. However that may be, Walpole's trifling was the first forerunner of much that has occupied the minds of much greater artists ever since. And thus his initiative in literature has been as fruitful as his initiative in art. The "Castle of Otranto" and the "Mysterious Mother" were the progenitors of Mrs Radcliffe's romances, and probably had a strong influence upon the author of "Ivanhoe." Frowning castles and gloomy monasteries, knights in

armour, and ladies in distress, and monks and nuns and hermits, all the scenery and the characters that have peopled the imagination of the romantic school, may be said to have had their origin on the night when Walpole lay down to sleep, his head crammed full of Wardour Street curiosities, and dreamt that he saw a gigantic hand in armour resting on the banister of his staircase. In three months from that time he had elaborated a story, the object of which, as defined by himself, was to combine the charms of the old romance and the modern novel, and which, to say the least, strikes us now like an exaggerated caricature of the later school. Scott criticises "The Castle of Otranto" seriously, and even Macaulay speaks of it with a certain respect. Absurd as the burlesque seems, our ancestors found it amusing, and, what is stranger, awe inspiring. Excitable readers shuddered when a helmet of more than gigantic size fell from the clouds, in the first chapter, and crushed the young baron to atoms on the eve of his wedding, as a trap smashes a mouse. This, however, was merely a foretaste of a series of unprecedented phenomena. At one moment the portrait of Manfred's grandfather, without the least premonitory warning, utters a deep sigh, and heaves its breast, after which it descends to the floor with a

grave and melancholy air. Presently the menials catch sight of a leg and foot in armour to match the helmet, and apparently belonging to a ghost which has lain down promiscuously in the picture gallery. Most appalling, however, of all is the adventure which happened to Count Frederick in the oratory. Kneeling before the altar was a tall figure in a long cloak. As he approached it rose, and, turning round, disclosed to him the fleshless jaws and empty eyesockets of a skeleton. The ghost disappeared as ghosts generally do after giving a perfectly unnecessary warning, and the catastrophe is soon reached by the final appearance of the whole suit of armour with the ghost inside it, who bursts the castle to bits like an eggshell, and, towering towards the sky, exclaims, "Theodore is the true heir of Alphonso!" This proceeding fortunately made a lawsuit unnecessary, and if the castle was ruined at once, it is not quite impossible that the same result might have been attained more slowly by litigation. The whole machinery strikes us as simply babyish, unless we charitably assume the whole to be intentionally burlesque. The intention is pretty evident in the solemn scene in the chapel, which closes thus:—"As he spake these words, three drops of blood fell from the nose of Alphonso's statue" (Alphonso is the spectre in armour).

"Manfred turned pale, and the princess sank on her knees. 'Behold!' said the friar, 'mark this miraculous indication that the blood of Alphonso will never mix with that of Manfred!'" Nor can we think that the story is rendered much more interesting by Walpole's simple expedient of introducing into the midst of these portents a set of waiting-maids and peasants, who talk in the familiar style of the smart valets in Congreve's or Sheridan's comedies.

Yet, babyish as this mass of nursery tales may appear to us, it is curious that the theory which Walpole advocated has been exactly carried out. He wished to relieve the prosaic realism of the school of Fielding and Smollett by making use of romantic associations, without altogether taking leave of the language of common life. He sought to make real men and women out of mediæval knights and ladies, or, in other words, he made a first experimental trip into the province afterwards occupied by Scott. The "Mysterious Mother" is in the same taste; and his interest in Ossian, in Chatterton, and in Percy's Relics, is another proof of his anticipation of the coming change of sentiment. He was an arrant trifler, it is true; too delicately constituted for real work in literature and politics, and inclined to take a cynical view of his contempo-

raries generally, he turned for amusement to antiquarianism, and was the first to set modern art and literature masquerading in the antique dresses. That he was quite conscious of the necessity for more serious study, appears in his letters, in one of which, for example, he proposes a systematic history of Gothic architecture, such as has since been often enough executed. It does not, it may be said, require any great intellect, or even any exquisite taste, for a fine gentleman to strike out a new line of dilettante amusement. In truth, Walpole has no pretensions whatever to be regarded as a great original creator, or even as one of the few infallible critics. The only man of his time who had some claim to that last title was his friend Gray, who shared his Gothic tastes with greatly superior knowledge. But he was indefinitely superior to the great mass of commonplace writers who attain a kind of bastard infallibility by always accepting the average verdict of the time; which, on the principle of the *vox populi*, is more often right than that of any dissenter. There is an intermediate class of men who are useful as sensitive barometers to foretell coming changes of opinion. Their intellects are mobile if shallow; and, perhaps, their want of serious interest in contemporary intellects renders them more accessible

to the earliest symptoms of superficial shiftings of taste. They are anxious to be at the head of the fashions in thought as well as in dress, and pure love of novelty serves to some extent in place of genuine originality. Amongst such men, Walpole deserves a high place; and it is not easy to obtain a high place even amongst such men. The people who succeed best at trifles are those who are capable of something better. In spite of Johnson's aphorism, it is the colossus who, when he tries, can cut the best heads upon cherry-stones, as well as hew statues out of rock. Walpole was no colossus; but his peevish anxiety to affect even more frivolity than was really natural to him, has blinded his critics to the real power of a remarkably acute, versatile, and original intellect. We cannot regard him with much respect, and still less with much affection; but the more we examine his work, the more we shall admire his extreme cleverness.

V.

DR JOHNSON'S WRITINGS.

A BOOK has recently appeared of which it is the professed object to give to the modern generation of lazy readers the pith of Boswell's immortal biography. I shall, for sufficient reasons, refrain from discussing the merits of the performance. One remark, indeed, may be made in passing. The circle of readers to whom such a book is welcome must, of necessity, be limited. To the true lovers of Boswell it is, to say the least, superfluous; the gentlest omissions will always mangle some people's favourite passages, and additions, whatever skill they may display, necessarily injure that dramatic vivacity which is one of the great charms of the original. The most discreet of cicerones is an intruder when we open our old favourite, and, without further magic, retire into that delicious nook of eighteenth century society. Upon those, again, who cannot appreciate the infinite humour of the original,

the mere excision of the less lively pages will be thrown away. There remains only that narrow margin of readers whose appetites, languid but not extinct, can be titillated by the promise that they shall not have the trouble of making their own selection. Let us wish them good digestions, and, in spite of modern changes of fashion, more robust taste for the future. I would still hope that to many readers Boswell has been what he has certainly been to some, the first writer who gave them a love of English literature, and the most charming of all companions long after the bloom of novelty has departed. I subscribe most cheerfully to Mr Lewes's statement that he estimates his acquaintances according to their estimate of Boswell. A man, indeed, may be a good Christian, and an excellent father of a family, without loving Johnson or Boswell, for a sense of humour is not one of the primary virtues. But Boswell's is one of the very few books which, after many years of familiarity, will still provoke a hearty laugh even in the solitude of a study; and the laughter is of that kind which does one good.

I do not wish, however, to pronounce one more eulogy upon an old friend, but to say a few words on a question which he sometimes suggests. Macaulay's

well-known but provoking essay is more than usually lavish in overstrained paradoxes. He has explicitly declared that Boswell wrote one of the most charming of books because he was one of the greatest of fools. And his remarks suggest, if they do not implicitly assert, that Johnson wrote some of the most unreadable of books, although, if not because, he possessed one of the most vigorous intellects of the time. Mr Carlyle has given a sufficient explanation of the first paradox; but the second may justify a little further inquiry. As a general rule, the talk of a great man is the reflection of his books. Nothing is so false as the common saying that the presence of a distinguished writer is generally disappointing. It exemplifies a very common delusion. People are so impressed by the disparity which sometimes occurs, that they take the exception for the rule. It is, of course, true that a man's verbal utterances may differ materially from his written utterances. He may, like Addison, be shy in company; he may, like many retired students, be slow in collecting his thoughts; or he may, like Goldsmith, be over anxious to shine at all hazards. But a patient observer will even then detect the essential identity under superficial differences; and in the majority of cases, as in that of Macaulay himself, the talking and

the writing are palpably and almost absurdly similar. The whole art of criticism consists in learning to know the human being who is partially revealed to us in his spoken or his written words. Whatever the means of communication, the problem is the same. The two methods of inquiry may supplement each other; but their substantial agreement is the test of their accuracy. If Johnson, as a writer, appears to us to be a mere windbag and manufacturer of sesquipedalian verbiage, whilst, as a talker, he appears to be one of the most genuine and deeply feeling of men, we may be sure that our analysis has been somewhere defective. The discrepancy is, of course, partly explained by the faults of Johnson's style; but the explanation only removes the difficulty a degree further. "The style is the man" is a very excellent aphorism, though some eminent writers have lately pointed out that Buffon's original remark was *le style c'est de l'homme.* That only proves that, like many other good sayings, it has been polished and brought to perfection by the process of attrition in numerous minds, instead of being struck out at a blow by a solitary thinker. From a purely logical point of view, Buffon may be correct; but the very essence of an aphorism is that slight exaggeration which makes it more biting whilst less rigidly accurate.

According to Buffon, the style might belong to a man as an acquisition rather than to natural growth. There are parasitical writers who, in the old phrase, have "formed their style," by the imitation of accepted models, and who have, therefore, possessed it only by right of appropriation. Boswell has a discussion as to the writers who may have served Johnson in this capacity. But, in fact, Johnson, like all other men of strong idiosyncrasy, formed his style as he formed his legs. The peculiarities of his limbs were in some degree the result of conscious efforts in walking, swimming, and "buffeting with his books." This development was doubtless more fully determined by the constitution which he brought into the world, and the circumstances under which he was brought up. And even that queer Johnsonese, which Macaulay supposes him to have adopted in accordance with a more definite literary theory, will probably appear to be the natural expression of certain innate tendencies, and of the mental atmosphere which he breathed from youth. To appreciate fairly the strangely cumbrous form of his written speech, we must penetrate more deeply than may at first sight seem necessary beneath the outer rind of this literary Behemoth. The difficulty of such spiritual dissection is, indeed, very great; but some little light

may be thrown upon the subject by following out such indications as we possess.

The talking Johnson is sufficiently familiar to us. So far as Boswell needs an interpreter, Mr Carlyle has done all that can be done. He has concentrated and explained what is diffused, and often unconsciously indicated, in Boswell's pages. When reading Boswell, we are half ashamed of his power over our sympathies. It is like turning over a portfolio of sketches, caricatured, inadequate, and each giving only some imperfect aspect of the original. Macaulay's smart paradoxes only increase our perplexity by throwing the superficial contrasts into stronger relief. Mr Carlyle, with true imaginative insight, gives us at once the essence of Johnson; he brings before our eyes the luminous body of which we had previously been conscious only by a series of imperfect images refracted through a number of distorting media. To render such a service effectually is the highest triumph of criticism; and it would be impertinent to say again in feebler language what Mr Carlyle has expressed so forcibly. We may, however, recall certain general conclusions by way of preface to the problem which he has not expressly considered, how far Johnson succeeded in expressing himself through his writings.

The world, as Mr Carlyle sees it, is composed, we all know, of two classes: there are "the dull millions, who, as a dull flock, roll hither and thither, whithersoever they are led," and there are a few superior natures who can see and can will. There are, in other words, the heroes, and those whose highest wisdom is to be hero-worshippers. Johnson's glory is that he belonged to the sacred band, though he could not claim within it the highest, or even a very high, rank. In the current dialect, therefore, he was "nowise a clothes-horse or patent digester, but a genuine man." Whatever the accuracy of the general doctrine, or of certain corollaries which are drawn from it, the application to Johnson explains one main condition of his power. Persons of colourless imagination may hold—nor will we dispute their verdict—that Mr Carlyle overcharges his lights and shades, and brings his heroes into too startling a contrast with the vulgar herd. Yet it is undeniable that the great bulk of mankind are transmitters rather than originators of spiritual force. Most of us are necessarily condemned to express our thoughts in formulas which we have learnt from others and can but slightly tinge with our feeble personality. Nor, as a rule, are we even consistent disciples of any one school of thought. What we call our opinions are

mere bundles of incoherent formulæ, arbitrarily stitched together because our reasoning faculties are too dull to make inconsistency painful. Of the vast piles of books which load our libraries, ninety-nine hundredths and more are but printed echoes: and it is the rarest of pleasures to say, Here is a distinct record of impressions at first hand. We commonplace beings are hurried along in the crowd, living from hand to mouth on such slices of material and spiritual food as happen to drift in our direction, with little more power of taking an independent course, or of forming any general theory, than the polyps which are carried along by an oceanic current. Ask any man what he thinks of the world in which he is placed: whether, for example, it is on the whole a scene of happiness or misery, and he will either answer by some cut-and-dried fragments of what was once wisdom, or he will confine himself to a few incoherent details. He had a good dinner to-day and a bad toothache yesterday, and a family affliction or blessing the day before. But he is as incapable of summing up his impressions as an infant of performing an operation in the differential calculus. It is as rare as it is refreshing to find a man who can stand on his own legs and be conscious of his own feelings, who is sturdy enough to react as well as to transmit action, and

lofty enough to raise himself above the hurrying crowd and have some distinct belief as to whence it is coming and whither it is going. Now Johnson, as one of the sturdiest of mankind, had the power due to a very distinct sentiment, if not to a very clear theory, about the world in which he lived. It had buffeted him severely enough, and he had formed a decisive estimate of its value. He was no man to be put off with mere phrases in place of opinions, or to accept doctrines which were not capable of expressing genuine emotion. To this it must be added, that his emotions were as deep and tender as they were genuine. How sacred was his love for his old and ugly wife; how warm his sympathy wherever it could be effective; how manly the self-respect with which he guarded his dignity through all the temptations of Grub Street, need not be once more pointed out. Perhaps, however, it is worth while to notice the extreme rarity of such qualities. Many people, we think, love their fathers. Fortunately, that is true; but in how many people is filial affection strong enough to overpower the dread of eccentricity? How many men would have been capable of doing penance in Uttoxeter market years after their father's death for a long-passed act of disobedience? Most of us, again, would have a temporary emotion of pity for an outcast

lying helplessly in the street. We should call the police, or send her in a cab to the workhouse, or, at least, write to the "Times" to denounce the defective arrangements of public charity. But it is perhaps better not to ask how many good Samaritans would take her on their shoulders to their own homes, care for her wants, and put her into a better way of life.

In the lives of most eminent men we find much good feeling and honourable conduct; but it is an exception, even in the case of good men, when we find that a life has been shaped by other than the ordinary conventions, or that emotions have dared to overflow the well-worn channels of respectability. The love which we feel for Johnson is due to the fact that the pivots upon which his life turned are invariably noble motives, and not mere obedience to custom. More than one modern writer has expressed a fraternal affection for Addison, and it is justified by the kindly humour which breathes through his "Essays." But what anecdote of that most decorous and successful person touches our hearts or has the heroic ring of Johnson's wrestlings with adverse fortune? Addison showed how a Christian could die—when his life has run smoothly through pleasant places, secretaryships of state, and marriages with countesses, and when

nothing—except a few overdoses of port wine—has shaken his nerves or ruffled his temper. A far deeper emotion rises at the deathbed of the rugged old pilgrim, who has fought his way to peace in spite of troubles within and without, who has been jeered in Vanity Fair and descended into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and escaped with pain and difficulty from the clutches of Giant Despair. When the last feelings of such a man are tender, solemn, and simple, we feel ourselves in a higher presence than that of an amiable gentleman who simply died, as he lived, with consummate decorum.

On turning, however, from Johnson's life to his writings, from Boswell to the "Rambler," it must be admitted that the shock is trying to our nerves. The "Rambler" has, indeed, high merits. The impression which it made upon his own generation proves the fact; for the reputation, however temporary, was not won by a concession to the fashions of the day, but to the influence of a strong judgment uttering itself through uncouth forms. The melancholy which colours its pages is the melancholy of a noble nature. The tone of thought reminds us of Bishop Butler, whose writings, defaced by a style even more tiresome, though less pompous than Johnson's, have owed their

enduring reputation to a philosophical acuteness in which Johnson was certainly very deficient. Both of these great men, however, impress us by their deep sense of the evils under which humanity suffers, and their rejection of the superficial optimism of the day. Butler's sadness, undoubtedly, is that of a recluse, and Johnson's that of a man of the world; but the sentiment is fundamentally the same. It may be added, too, that here, as elsewhere, Johnson speaks with the sincerity of a man drawing upon his own experience. He announces himself as a scholar thrust out upon the world rather by necessity than choice; and a large proportion of the papers dwell upon the various sufferings of the literary class. Nobody could speak more feelingly of those sufferings, as no one had a closer personal acquaintance with them. But allowing to Johnson whatever credit is due to the man who performs one more variation on the old theme, *Vanitas vanitatum*, we must in candour admit that the "Rambler" has the one unpardonable fault: it is unreadable.

What an amazing turn it shows for commonplaces! That life is short, that marriages from mercenary motives produce unhappiness, that different men are virtuous in different degrees, that advice is generally

ineffectual, that adversity has its uses, that fame is liable to suffer from detraction;—these and a host of other such maxims are of the kind upon which no genius and no depth of feeling can confer a momentary interest. Here and there indeed the pompous utterance invests them with an unlucky air of absurdity. "Let no man from this time," is the comment in one of his stories, "suffer his felicity to depend on the death of his aunt." Every actor, of course, uses the same dialect. A gay young gentleman tells us that he used to amuse his companions by giving them notice of his friends' oddities. "Every man," he says, "has some habitual contortion of body, or established mode of expression, which never fails to excite mirth if it be pointed out to notice. By premonition of these particularities, I secured our pleasantry." The feminine characters, Flirtillas, and Cleoras, and Euphelias, and Penthesileas, are, if possible, still more grotesque. Macaulay remarks that he wears the petticoat with as ill a grace as Falstaff himself. The reader, he thinks, will cry out with Sir Hugh, "I like not when a 'oman has a great peard! I spy a great peard under her muffler." Oddly enough Johnson gives the very same quotation; and goes on to warn his supposed correspondents that Phyllis

must send no more letters from the Horse Guards; and that Belinda must "resign her pretensions to female elegance till she has lived three weeks without hearing the politics of Button's Coffee House." The Doctor was probably sensible enough of his own defects. And yet there is still a more wearisome set of articles. In emulation of the precedent set by Addison, Johnson indulges in the dreariest of allegories. Criticism, we are told, was the eldest daughter of Labour and Truth, but at last resigned in favour of Time, and left Prejudice and False Taste to reign in company with Fraud and Mischief. Then we have the genealogy of Wit and Learning, and of Satire, the son of Wit and Malice, and an account of their various quarrels, and the decision of Jupiter. Neither are the histories of such semi-allegorical personages as Almamoulin, the son of Nouradin, or of Anningait and Ayut, the Greenland lovers, much more refreshing to modern readers. That Johnson possessed humour of no mean order, we know from Boswell; but no critic could have divined his power from the clumsy gambols in which he occasionally recreates himself. Perhaps his happiest effort is a dissertation upon the advantage of living in garrets; but the humour struggles and gasps dreadfully under the weight of words.

"There are," he says, "some who would continue blockheads" (the Alpine Club was not yet founded), "even on the summit of the Andes or the Peak of Teneriffe. But let not any man be considered as unimprovable till this potent remedy has been tried; for perhaps he was found to be great only in a garret, as the joiner of Aretæus was rational in no other place but his own shop."

How could a man of real power write such unendurable stuff? Or how, indeed, could any man come to embody his thoughts in the style of which one other sentence will be a sufficient example? As it is afterwards nearly repeated, it may be supposed to have struck his fancy. The remarks of the philosophers who denounce temerity are, he says, "too just to be disputed and too salutary to be rejected; but there is likewise some danger lest timorous prudence should be inculcated till courage and enterprise are wholly repressed and the mind congested in perpetual inactivity by the fatal influence of frigorifick wisdom." Is there not some danger, we ask, that the mind will be benumbed into perpetual torpidity by the influence of this soporific sapience? It is still true, however, that this Johnsonese, so often burlesqued and ridiculed, was, as far as we can judge, a genuine product. Macaulay says that it is more offensive than the

mannerism of Milton or Burke, because it is a mannerism adopted on principle and sustained by constant effort. Facts do not confirm the theory. Milton's prose style seems to be the result of a conscious effort to run English into classical moulds. Burke's mannerism does not appear in his early writings, and we can trace its development from the imitation of Bolingbroke to the last declamation against the Revolution. But Johnson seems to have written Johnsonese from his cradle. In his first original composition, the preface to Father Lobo's "Abyssinia," the style is as distinctive as in the "Rambler." The Parliamentary reports in the "Gentleman's Magazine" make Pitt and Fox* express sentiments which are probably their own in language which is as unmistakably Johnson's. It is clear that his style, good or bad, was the same from his earliest efforts. It is only in his last book, the "Lives of the Poets," that the mannerism, though equally marked, is so far subdued as to be tolerable. What he himself called his habit of using "too big words and too many of them" was no affectation, but as much the result of his special idiosyncrasy as his queer gruntings and twitchings.

* See, for example, the great debate on February 13th, 1741.

Sir Joshua Reynolds indeed maintained, and we may believe so attentive an observer, that his strange physical contortions were the result of bad habit, not of actual disease. Johnson, he said, could sit as still as other people when his attention was called to it. And possibly, if he had tried, he might have avoided the fault of making "little fishes talk like whales." But how did the bad habits arise? According to Boswell, Johnson professed to have "formed his style" partly upon Sir W. Temple, and on "Chambers's Proposal for his Dictionary." The statement was obviously misinterpreted: but there is a glimmering of truth in the theory that the "style was formed"—so far as those words have any meaning—on the "giants of the seventeenth century," and especially upon Sir Thomas Browne. Johnson's taste, in fact, had led him to the study of writers in many ways congenial to him. His favourite book, as we know, was Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy." The pedantry of the older school did not repel him; the weighty thought rightly attracted him; and the more complex structure of sentence was perhaps a pleasant contrast to an ear saturated with the Gallicised neatness of Addison and Pope. Unluckily, the secret of the old majestic cadence was hopelessly lost. Johnson, though spiritually akin to the giants, was the firmest ally

and subject of the dwarfish dynasty which supplanted them. The very faculty of hearing seems to change in obedience to some mysterious law at different stages of intellectual development; and that which to one generation is delicious music is to another a mere droning of bag-pipes or the grinding of monotonous barrel-organs.

Assuming that a man can find perfect satisfaction in the versification of the "Essay on Man," we can understand his saying of Lycidas, that "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." In one of the "Ramblers" we are informed that the accent in blank verse ought properly to rest upon every second syllable throughout the whole line. A little variety must, he admits, be allowed to avoid satiety; but all lines which do not go in the steady jogtrot of alternate beats, as regularly as the piston of a steam-engine, are more or less defective. This simple-minded system naturally makes wild work with the poetry of the "mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies." Milton's harsh cadences are indeed excused on the odd ground, that he who was "vindicating the ways of God to man" might have been condemned for "lavishing much of his attention upon syllables and sounds." Moreover, the poor man did his best by introducing sounding proper

names, even when they "added little music to his poem." An example of this feeble, though well-meant expedient, being the passage about the moon, which—

> "The Tuscan artist views,
> At evening, from the top of Fiesole
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands," &c.

This profanity passed at the time for orthodoxy. But the misfortune was, that Johnson, unhesitatingly subscribing to the rules of Queen Anne's critics, is always instinctively feeling after the grander effects of the old school. Nature prompts him to the stateliness of Milton, whilst Art orders him to deal out long and short syllables alternately, and to make them up in parcels of ten, and then tie the parcels together in pairs by the help of a rhyme. The natural utterance of a man of strong perceptions, but of unwieldy intellect, of a melancholy temperament, and capable of very deep, but not vivacious emotions, would be in stately and elaborate phrases. His style was not more distinctly a work of art than the style of Browne or Milton, but, unluckily, it was a work of bad art. He had the misfortune, not so rare as it may sound, to be born in the wrong century; and is, therefore, a giant in fetters; the amplitude of stride is still there, but it is checked into mechanical regularity. A similar phenomenon is

observable in other writers of the time. The blank verse of Young, for example, is generally set to Pope's tune with the omission of the rhymes; whilst Thomson, revolting more or less consciously against the canons of his time, too often falls into more pompous mouthing. Shaftesbury, in the previous generation, trying to write poetical prose, becomes as pedantic as Johnson, though in a different style; and Gibbon's mannerism is a familiar example of a similar escape from a monotonous simplicity into awkward complexity. Such writers are like men who have been chilled by what Johnson would call the "frigorifick" influence of the classicism of their fathers, and whose numbed limbs move stiffly and awkwardly in a first attempt to regain the old liberty. The form, too, of the "Rambler," is unfortunate. Johnson has always Addison before his eyes; to whom it was formerly the fashion to compare him for the same excellent reason which has recently suggested comparisons between Dickens and Thackeray, namely, that their works were published in the same external shape. Unluckily, Johnson gave too much excuse for the comparison by really imitating Addison. He has to make allegories, and to give lively sketches of feminine peculiarities, and to ridicule social foibles of which he was, at most, a distant observer. The inevitable consequence

is, that though here and there we catch a glimpse of the genuine man, we are, generally, too much provoked by the awkwardness of his costume to be capable of enjoying, or even reading him.

In many of his writings, however, Johnson manages, almost entirely, to throw off these impediments. In his deep capacity for sympathy and reverence, we recognise some of the elements that go to the making of a poet. He is always a man of intuitions rather than of discursive intellect; often keen of vision, though wanting in analytical power. For poetry, indeed, as it is often understood now, or even as it was understood by Pope, he had little enough qualification. He had not the intellectual vivacity implied in the marvellously neat workmanship of Pope, and still less the delight in all natural and artistic beauty which we generally take to be essential to poetic excellence. His contempt for "Lycidas" is sufficiently significant upon that head. Still more characteristic is the incapacity to understand Spenser, which comes out incidentally in his remarks upon some of those imitations, which even in the middle of the eighteenth century showed that the sensibility to the purest form of poetry was not by any means extinct amongst us. But there is a poetry, though we sometimes seem to forget it, which is the natural expression of deep

moral sentiment; and of this Johnson has written enough to reveal very genuine power. The touching verses upon the death of Levett are almost as pathetic as Cowper; and fragments of the two imitations of Juvenal have struck deep enough to be not quite forgotten. We still quote the lines about pointing a moral and adorning a tale, which conclude a really noble passage. We are too often reminded of his melancholy musings over the

"Fears of the brave and follies of the wise,"

and a few of the concluding lines of the "Vanity of Human Wishes," in which he answers the question whether man must of necessity

"Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate,"

in helplessness and ignorance, may have something of a familiar ring. We are to give thanks, he says,

"For love, which scarce collective man can fill;
For patience, sovereign o'er transmuted ill;
For faith, that, panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind nature's signal for retreat;
These goods for man, the laws of heaven ordain,
These goods He grants, who grants the power to gain,
With these celestial wisdom calms the mind,
And makes the happiness she does not find."

These lines, and many others which might be quoted, are

noble in expression, as well as lofty and tender in feeling. Johnson, like Wordsworth, or even more deeply than Wordsworth, had felt all the "heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world;" and, though he stumbles a little in the narrow limits of his versification, he bears himself nobly, and manages to put his heart into his poetry. Coleridge's paraphrase of the well-known lines, "Let observation with extensive observation, observe mankind from China to Peru," would prevent us from saying that he had thrown off his verbiage. He has not the felicity of Goldsmith's "Traveller," though he wrote one of the best couplets in that admirable poem; but his ponderous lines show genuine vigour, and can be excluded from poetry only by the help of an arbitrary classification.

The fullest expression, however, of Johnson's feeling is undoubtedly to be found in "Rasselas." The inevitable comparison with Voltaire's "Candide," which, by an odd coincidence, appeared almost simultaneously, suggests some curious reflections. The resemblance between the moral of the two books is so strong that, as Johnson remarked, it would have been difficult not to suppose that one had given a hint to the other but for the chronological difficulty. The contrast, indeed, is as marked as the likeness. "Candide" is not adapted

for family reading, whereas "Rasselas" might be a text-book for young ladies studying English in a convent. "Candide," whatever the disgust which it may cause, not only to the orthodox but to the reverent mind, is a marvel of clearness and vivacity; whereas to read "Rasselas" is about as exhilarating as to wade knee-deep through a sandy desert. Voltaire and Johnson, however, the great sceptic and the last of the true old Tories, coincide pretty well in their view of the world, and in the remedy which they suggest. The world is, they agree, full of misery, and the optimism which would deny the reality of the misery is childish. *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* is the last word of "Candide," and Johnson's teaching, both here and elsewhere, may be summed up in the words "Work, and don't whine." It need not be considered here, nor, perhaps, is it quite plain, what speculative conclusions Voltaire meant to draw from his teaching. The peculiarity of Johnson is, that he is apparently indifferent to any such conclusion. A dogmatic assertion that the world is on the whole a scene of misery, may be pressed into the service of different philosophies. Johnson asserted the opinion resolutely, both in writing and in conversation, but apparently never troubled himself with any inferences but such as

have a directly practical tendency. He was no "speculatist"—a word which now strikes us as having an American twang, but which was familiar to the lexicographer. His only excursion to the borders of such regions was in the very forcible review of Soane Jenyns, who had made a jaunty attempt to explain the origin of evil by the help of a few of Pope's epigrams. Johnson's sledge-hammer smashes his flimsy platitudes to pieces with an energy too good for such a foe. For speculation, properly so called, there was no need. The review, like "Rasselas," is simply a vigorous protest against the popular attempt to make things pleasant by a feeble dilution of the most watery kind of popular teaching. He has no trouble in remarking that the evils of poverty are not alleviated by calling it "want of riches," and that there is a poverty which involves want of necessaries. Such consolation, indeed, came rather awkwardly from the elegant country gentleman to the poor scholar who had just known by experience what it was to live upon fourpence-halfpenny a day. Johnson resolutely looks facts in the face, and calls ugly things by their right names. Men, he tells us over and over again, are wretched, and there is no use in denying it. This

doctrine appears in his familiar talk, and even in the papers which he meant to be light reading. He begins the prologue to a comedy with the words—

> "Pressed with the load of life, the weary mind
> Surveys the general toil of human kind."

In the "Life of Savage," he makes the common remark that the lives of many of the greatest teachers of mankind have been miserable. The explanation to which he inclines is, that they have not been more miserable than their neighbours, but that their misery has been more conspicuous. His melancholy view of life may have been caused simply by his unfortunate constitution; for everybody sees in the disease of his own liver a disorder of the universe; but it was also intensified by the natural reaction of a powerful nature against the fluent optimism of the time, which expressed itself in Pope's aphorism, Whatever is, is right. The strongest men of the time revolted against that attempt to cure a deep-seated disease by a few fine speeches. The form taken by Johnson's revolt is characteristic. His nature was too tender and too manly to incline to Swift's misanthropy. Men might be wretched, but he would not therefore revile them as filthy Yahoos. He was too reverent and cared too little for abstract thought

to share the scepticism of Voltaire. In this miserable world the one worthy object of ambition is to do one's duty, and the one consolation deserving the name is to be found in religion. That Johnson's religious opinions sometimes took the form of rather grotesque superstition may be true; and it is easy enough to ridicule some of its manifestations. He took the creed of his day without much examination of the evidence upon which its dogmas rested; but a writer must be thoughtless indeed who was more inclined to laugh at his superficial oddities, than to admire the reverent spirit and the brave self-respect with which he struggled through a painful life. The protest of "Rasselas" against optimism is therefore widely different from the protest of Voltaire. The deep and genuine feeling of the Frenchman is concealed under flippant assaults upon the dogmas of popular theology; the Englishman desires to impress upon us the futility of all human enjoyments, with a view to deepen the solemnity of our habitual tone of thought. It is true, indeed, that the evil is dwelt upon more forcibly than the remedy. The book is all the more impressive. We are almost appalled by the gloomy strength which sees so forcibly the misery of the world and rejects so unequivocally all the palliatives of sentiment and philosophy. The melancholy is intensified

by the ponderous style, which suggests a man weary of a heavy burden. The air seems to be filled with what Johnson once called "inspissated gloom." "Rasselas," one may say, has a narrow escape of being a great book, though it is ill calculated for the hasty readers of to-day. Indeed, the defects are serious enough. The class of writing to which it belongs demands a certain dramatic picturesqueness to point the moral effectively. Not only the long-winded sentences, but the slow evolution of thought and the deliberation with which he works out his pictures of misery, make the general effect dull beside such books as "Candide" or "Gulliver's Travels." A touch of epigrammatic exaggeration is very much needed; and yet anybody who has the courage to read it through will admit that Johnson is not an unworthy guide into those gloomy regions of imagination, which we all visit sometimes, and which it is as well to visit in good company.

After his fashion, Johnson is a fair representative of Greatheart. His melancholy is distinguished from that of feebler men by the strength of the conviction that "it will do no good to whine." We know his view of the great prophet of the Revolutionary school. "Rousseau," he said to Boswell's astonishment, "is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for

his transportation than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations." That is a fine specimen of the good Johnsonese prejudices of which we hear so much; and, of course, it is easy to infer that Johnson was an ignorant bigot, who had not in any degree taken the measure of the great moving forces of his time. Nothing, indeed, can be truer than that Johnson cared very little for the new gospel of the rights of man. His truly British contempt for all such fancies ("for anything I see," he once said, "foreigners are fools") is one of his strongest characteristics. Now, Rousseau and his like took a view of the world as it was quite as melancholy as Johnson's. They inferred that it ought to be turned upside down, assured that the millennium would begin as soon as a few revolutionary dogmas were accepted. All their remedies appeared to the excellent Doctor as so much of that cant of which it was a man's first duty to clear his mind. The evils of life were far too deeply seated to be caused or cured by kings or demagogues. One of the most popular commonplaces of the day was the mischief of luxury. That we were all on the high road to ruin on account of our wealth, our corruption, and the growth of the national debt, was the text of any

number of political agitators. The whole of this talk was, to his mind, so much whining and cant. Luxury did no harm, and the mass of the people, as indeed was in one sense obvious enough, had only too little of it. The pet "state of nature" of theorists was a silly figment. The genuine savage was little better than an animal; and a savage woman, whose contempt for civilised life had prompted her to escape to the forest, was simply a "speaking cat." The natural equality of mankind was mere moonshine. So far is it from being true, he says, that no two people can be together for half an hour without one acquiring an evident superiority over the other. Subordination is an essential element of human happiness. A Whig stinks in his nostrils because to his eye modern Whiggism is "a negation of all principles." As he said of Priestley's writings, it unsettles everything and settles nothing. "He is a cursed Whig, a *bottomless* Whig as they all are now," was his description apparently of Burke. Order, in fact, is a vital necessity; what particular form it may take matters comparatively little; and therefore all revolutionary dogmas were chimerical as an attack upon the inevitable conditions of life and mischievous so far as productive of useless discontent. We need not ask what mixture of truth

and falsehood there may be in these principles. Of course, a Radical, or even a respectable Whig, like Macaulay, who believed in the magical efficacy of the British Constitution, might shriek or laugh at such doctrine. Johnson's political pamphlets, besides the defects natural to a writer who was only a politician by accident, advocate the most retrograde doctrines. Nobody at the present day thinks that the Stamp Act was an admirable or justifiable measure; or would approve of telling the Americans that they ought to have been grateful for their long exemption instead of indignant at the imposition. "We do not put a calf into the plough; we wait till he is an ox"—was not a judicious taunt. He was utterly wrong; and, if everybody who is utterly wrong in a political controversy deserves unmixed contempt, there is no more to be said for him. We might indeed argue that Johnson was in some ways entitled to the sympathy of enlightened people. His hatred of the Americans was complicated by his hatred of slaveowners. He anticipated Lincoln in proposing the emancipation of the negroes as a military measure. His uniform hatred for the slave trade scandalised poor Boswell, who held that its abolition would be equivalent to "shutting the gates of mercy on mankind." His language about the

blundering tyranny of the English rule in Ireland would satisfy Mr Froude, though he would hardly have loved a Home Ruler. He denounces the frequency of capital punishment and the harshness of imprisonment for debt, and he invokes a compassionate treatment of the outcasts of our streets as warmly as the more sentimental Goldsmith. His conservatism may be at times obtuse, but it is never of the cynical variety. He hates cruelty and injustice as righteously as he hates anarchy. Indeed, Johnson's contempt for mouthing agitators of the Wilkes and Junius variety is one which may be shared by most thinkers who would not accept his principles. There is a vigorous passage in the "False Alarm" which is scarcely unjust to the patriots of the day. He describes the mode in which petitions are generally got up. They are sent from town to town, and the people flock to see what is to be sent to the king. "One man signs because he hates the Papists; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes; one because it will vex the parson; another because he owes his landlord nothing; one because he is rich; another because he is poor; one to show that he is not afraid, and another to show that he can write." The people, he thinks, are as well off as they are likely to be under any form of government; and

grievances about general warrants or the rights of juries in libel cases are not really felt so long as they have enough to eat and drink and wear. The error, we may probably say, was less in the contempt for a very shallow agitation than in the want of perception that deeper causes of discontent were accumulating in the background. Wilkes in himself was a worthless demagogue; but Wilkes was the straw carried by the rising tide of revolutionary sentiment, to which Johnson was entirely blind. Yet whatever we may think of his political philosophy, the value of these solid sturdy prejudices is undeniable. To the fact that Johnson was the typical representative of a large class of Englishmen we owe it that the Society of Rights did not develop into a Jacobin Club. The fine phrases on which Frenchmen became intoxicated never turned the heads of men impervious to abstract theories and incapable of dropping substances for shadows. There are evils in each temperament; but it is as well that some men should carry into politics that rooted contempt for whining which lay so deep in Johnson's nature. He scorned the sickliness of the Rousseau school as, in spite of his constitutional melancholy, he scorned valetudinarianism whether of the bodily or the spiritual order. He saw evil enough in the world

to be heartily, at times too roughly, impatient of all fine ladies who made a luxury of grief or of demagogues who shrieked about theoretical grievances which did not sensibly affect the happiness of one man in a thousand. The lady would not have time to nurse her sorrows if she had been a washerwoman; the grievances with which the demagogues yelled themselves hoarse could hardly be distinguished amidst the sorrows of the vast majority condemned to keep starvation at bay by unceasing labour. His incapacity for speculation makes his pamphlets worthless beside Burke's philosophical discourses; but the treatment, if wrong and defective on the theoretical side, is never contemptible. Here, as elsewhere, he judges by his intuitive aversions. He rejects too hastily whatever seems insipid or ill-flavoured to his spiritual appetite. Like all the shrewd and sensible part of mankind, he condemns as mere moonshine what may be really the first faint dawn of a new daylight. But then his intuitions are noble, and his fundamental belief is the vital importance of order, of religion, and of morality, coupled with a profound conviction, surely not erroneous, that the chief sources of human suffering lie far deeper than any of the remedies proposed by constitution-mongers and fluent theorists. The literary

version of these prejudices or principles, is given most explicitly in the "Lives of the Poets"— the book which is now the most readable of Johnson's performances, and which most frequently recalls his conversational style. Indeed, it is a thoroughly admirable book, and but for one or two defects might enjoy a much more decided popularity. It is full of shrewd sense and righteous as well as keen estimates of men and things. The "Life of Savage," written in earlier times, is the best existing portrait of that large class of authors who, in Johnson's phrase, "hung loose upon society" in the days of the Georges. The lives of Pope, Dryden, and others have scarcely been superseded, though much fuller information has since come to light; and they are all well worth reading. But the criticism, like the politics, is woefully out of date. Johnson's division between the shams and the realities deserves all respect in both cases, but in both cases he puts many things on the wrong side of the dividing line. His hearty contempt for sham pastorals and sham love-poetry will be probably shared by modern readers. "Who will hear of sheep and goats and myrtle bowers and purling rivulets through five acts? Such scenes please barbarians in the dawn of literature, and children in the dawn of life; but will be for the most part thrown away

as men grow wise and nations grow learned." But elsewhere he blunders into terrible misapprehensions. Where he errs by simply repeating the accepted rules of the Pope school, he for once talks mere second-hand nonsense. But his independent judgments are interesting even when erroneous. His unlucky assault upon "Lycidas," already noticed, is generally dismissed with a pitying shrug of the shoulders. "Among the flocks and copses and flowers appear the heathen deities; Jove and Phœbus, Neptune and Æolus, with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies. Nothing can less display knowledge, or less exercise invention, than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion, and must now feed his flocks alone; how one god asks another god what has become of Lycidas, and how neither god can tell. He who thus grieves can excite no sympathy, he who thus praises will confer no honour."

Of course every tyro in criticism has his answer ready; he can discourse about the æsthetic tendencies of the *Renaissance* period, and explain the necessity of placing one's self at a writer's point of view, and entering into the spirit of the time. He will add, perhaps, that "Lycidas" is a test of poetical feeling, and that he who does not appreciate its exquisite

melody has no music in his soul. The same writer who will tell us all this, and doubtless with perfect truth, would probably have adopted Pope or Johnson's theory with equal confidence if he had lived in the last century. "Lycidas" repelled Johnson by incongruities, which, from his point of view, were certainly offensive. Most modern readers, I will venture to suggest, feel the same annoyances, though they have not the courage to avow them freely. If poetry is to be judged exclusively by the simplicity and force with which it expresses sincere emotion, "Lycidas" would hardly convince us of Milton's profound sorrow for the death of King, and must be condemned accordingly. To the purely pictorial or musical effects of a poem Johnson was nearly blind; but that need not suggest a doubt as to the sincerity of his love for the poetry which came within the range of his own sympathies. Every critic is in effect criticising himself as well as his author; and I confess that to my mind an obviously sincere record of impressions, however onesided they may be, is infinitely refreshing, as revealing at least the honesty of the writer. The ordinary run of criticism generally implies nothing but the extreme desire of the author to show that he is open to the very last new literary fashion. I should wel-

come a good assault upon Shakspeare which was not prompted by a love of singularity; and there are half-a-dozen popular idols—I have not the courage to name them—upon whom I could witness a genuine attack with entire equanimity, not to say some complacency. If Johnson's blunder in this case implied sheer stupidity, one can only say that honest stupidity is a much better thing than clever insincerity or fluent repetition of second-hand dogmas. But, in fact, this dislike of "Lycidas," and a good many instances of critical incapacity might be added, is merely a misapplication of a very sound principle. The hatred of cant and humbug and affectation of all vanity is a most salutary ingredient even in poetical criticism. Johnson, with his natural ignorance of that historical method, the exaltation of which threatens to become a part of our contemporary cant, made the pardonable blunder of supposing that what would have been gross affectation in Gray must have been affectation in Milton. His ear had been too much corrupted by the contemporary school to enable him to recognise beauties which would even have shone through some conscious affectation. He had the rare courage —for, even then, Milton was one of the tabooed poets —to say what he thought as forcibly as he could say

it; and he has suffered the natural punishment of plain speaking. It must, of course, be admitted that a book embodying such principles is doomed to become more or less obsolete, like his political pamphlets. And yet, as significant of the writer's own character, as containing many passages of sound judgment, expressed in forcible language, it is still, though not a great book, really impressive within the limits of its capacity.

After this imperfect survey of Johnson's writings, it only remains to be noticed that all the most prominent peculiarities are the very same which give interest to his spoken utterances. The doctrine is the same, though the preacher's manner has changed. His melancholy is not so heavy-eyed and depressing in his talk, for we catch him at moments of excitement; but it is there, and sometimes breaks out emphatically and unexpectedly. The prospect of death often clouds his mind, and he bursts into tears when he thinks of his past sufferings. His sacred love of truth and uncompromising hatred of cant in all its innumerable transmutations, prompts half his most characteristic sayings. His queer prejudices take a humorous form and give a delightful zest to his conversation. His contempt for abstract speculation comes out when he vanquishes Berkeley, not with a grin,

but by "striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone." His arguments, indeed, never seem to have owed much to such logic as implies systematic and continuous thought. He scarcely waits till his pistol misses fire to knock you down with the butt-end. The merit of his best sayings is not that they compress an argument into a phrase, but that they are vivid expressions of an intuitive judgment. In other words, they are always humorous rather than witty. He holds his own belief with so vigorous a grasp that all argumentative devices for loosening it seem to be thrown away. As Boswell says, he is through your body in an instant without any preliminary parade; he gives a deadly lunge, but cares little for skill of fence. "We know we are free and there's an end of it," is his characteristic summary of a perplexed bit of metaphysics; and he would evidently have no patience to wander through the labyrinths in which men like Jonathan Edwards delighted to perplex themselves. We should have been glad to see a fuller report of one of those conversations in which Burke "wound into a subject like a serpent," and contrast his method with Johnson's downright hitting. Boswell had not the power, even if he had the will, to give an adequate account of such a "wit combat."

That such a mind should express itself most forcibly

in speech is intelligible enough. Conversation was to him not merely a contest, but a means of escape from himself. "I may be cracking my joke," he said to Boswell, "and cursing the sun: Sun, how I hate thy beams!" The phrase sounds exaggerated, but it was apparently his settled conviction that the only remedy for melancholy, except indeed the religious remedy, was in hard work or in the rapture of conversational strife. His little circle of friends called forth his humour as the House of Commons excited Chatham's eloquence; and both of them were inclined to mouth too much when deprived of the necessary stimulus. Chatham's set speeches were as pompous as Johnson's deliberate writing. Johnson and Chatham resemble the chemical bodies which acquire entirely new properties when raised beyond a certain degree of temperature. Indeed, we frequently meet touches of the conversational Johnson in his controversial writing. "Taxation no Tyranny" is at moments almost as pithy as Swift, though the style is never so simple. The celebrated Letter to Chesterfield, and the letter in which he tells MacPherson that he will not be "deterred from detecting what he thinks a cheat by the menaces of a ruffian," are as good specimens of the smashing repartee as anything in Boswell's reports. Nor, indeed, does his pomposity sink to mere verbiage

so often as might be supposed. It is by no means easy to translate his ponderous phrases into simple words without losing some of their meaning. The structure of the sentences is compact, though they are too elaborately balanced and stuffed with superfluous antitheses. The language might be simpler, but it is not a mere sham aggregation of words. His written style, however faulty in other respects, is neither slipshod nor ambiguous, and passes into his conversational style by imperceptible degrees. The radical identity is intelligible, though the superficial contrast is certainly curious. We may perhaps say that his century, unfavourable to him as a writer, gave just what he required for talking. If, as is sometimes said, the art of conversation is disappearing, it is because society has become too large and diffuse. The good talker, as, indeed, the good artist of every kind, depends upon the tacit co-operation of the social medium. The chorus, as, indeed, Johnson has shown very well in one of the "Ramblers," is quite as essential as the main performer. Nobody talks well in London, because everybody has constantly to meet a fresh set of interlocutors, and is as much put out as a musician who has to be always learning a new instrument. A literary dictator has ceased to be a possibility, so far as direct personal influence is concerned. In the club,

Johnson knew how every blow would tell, and in the rapid thrust and parry dropped the heavy style which muffled his utterances in print. He had to deal with concrete illustrations, instead of expanding into platitudinous generalities. The obsolete theories which impair the value of his criticism and his politics, become amusing in the form of pithy sayings, though they weary us when asserted in formal expositions. His greatest literary effort, the "Dictionary," has of necessity become antiquated in use, and, in spite of the intellectual vigour indicated, can hardly be commended for popular reading. And thus but for the inimitable Boswell, it must be admitted that Johnson would probably have sunk very deeply into oblivion. A few good sayings would have been preserved by Mrs Thrale and others, or have been handed down by tradition, and doubtless assigned in process of time to Sydney Smith and other conversational celebrities. A few couplets from the "Vanity of Human Wishes" would not yet have been submerged, and curious readers would have recognised the power of "Rasselas," and been delighted with some shrewd touches in the "Lives of the Poets." But with all desire to magnify critical insight, it must be admitted that that man would have shown singular penetration, and been regarded as an eccentric commentator, who

had divined the humour and the fervour of mind which lay hid in the remains of the huge lexicographer. And yet when we have once recognised his power, we can see it everywhere indicated in his writings, though by an unfortunate fatality the style or the substance was always so deeply affected by the faults of the time, that the product is never thoroughly sound. His tenacious conservatism caused him to cling to decaying materials for the want of anything better, and he has suffered the natural penalty. He was a great force half wasted, so far as literature was concerned, because the fashionable costume of the day hampered the free exercises of his powers, and because the only creeds to which he could attach himself were in the phase of decline and inanition. A century earlier or later he might have succeeded in expressing himself through books as well as through his talk; but it is not given to us to choose the time of our birth, and some very awkward consequences follow.

VI.

CRABBE'S POETRY.

It is nearly a century since George Crabbe, then a young man of five-and-twenty, put three pounds in his pocket and started from his native town of Aldborough with a box of clothes and a case of surgical instruments to make his fortune in London. Few men have attempted that adventure with less promising prospects. Any sensible adviser would have told him to prefer starvation in his native village to starvation in the back lanes of London. The adviser would, perhaps, have been vexed, but would not have been confuted, by Crabbe's good fortune. We should still recommend a youth not to jump into a river, though, of a thousand who try the experiment one may happen to be rescued by a benevolent millionaire, and be put in the road to fortune. The chances against Crabbe were enormous. Literature, considered as a trade, is a good deal better at the present day than it was towards the end of the last century, and yet any one who has an opportunity

of comparing the failures to the successes, would be more apt to quote Chatterton than Crabbe as a precedent for youthful aspirants. Crabbe, indeed, might say for himself that literature was the only path open to him. His father was collector of salt duties at Aldborough, a position, as one may imagine, of no very great emolument. He had, however, given his son the chance of acquiring a smattering of "scholarship," in the sense in which that word is used by the less educated lower classes. To the slender store of learning acquired in a cheap country school, the lad managed to add such medical training as could be picked up during an apprenticeship in an apothecary's shop. With this provision of knowledge he tried to obtain practice in his native town. He failed to get any patients of the paying variety. Crabbe was clumsy and absent-minded to the end of his life. He had, moreover, a taste for botany, and the shrewd inhabitants of Aldborough, with that perverse tendency to draw inferences which is characteristic of people who cannot reason, argued that as he picked up his samples in the ditches he ought to sell the medicines presumably compounded from them for nothing. In one way or other, poor Crabbe had sunk to the verge of distress.

Of course, under these circumstances, he had fallen in love and engaged himself at the age of eighteen to a young lady, apparently as poor as himself. Of course, too, he called Miss Elmy "Mira," and addressed her in verses which occasionally appeared in the poet's corner of a certain "Wheble's Magazine." My Mira, said the young surgeon in a style which must have been rather antiquated even in Aldborough—

> "My Mira, shepherds, is as fair
> As sylvan nymphs who haunt the vale;
> As sylphs who dwell in purest air,
> As fays who skim the dusky dale."

Moreover, he won a prize for a poem on Hope, and composed an "Allegorical Fable" and a piece called "The Atheist Reclaimed;" and, in short, added plentifully to the vast rubbish-heap of old-world verses, now decayed beyond the industry of the most persevering of Dryasdusts. Nay, he even succeeded by some mysterious means in getting one of his poems published separately. It was called "Inebriety," and was an unblushing imitation of Pope. Here is a couplet by way of sample:—

> "Champagne the courtier drinks the spleen to chase,
> The colonel Burgundy and Port his Grace."

From the satirical the poet diverges into the mock heroic:—

> "See Inebriety! her wand she waves,
> And lo! her pale, and lo! her purple slaves."

The interstices of the box of clothing which went with him from Aldborough to London, were doubtless crammed with much waste paper scribbled over with these feeble echoes of Pope's Satires, and with appeals to nymphs, muses, and shepherds. Crabbe was one of those men who are born a generation after their natural epoch, and was as little accessible to the change of fashion in poetry as in costume. When, therefore, he finally resolved to hazard his own fate and Mira's upon the results of his London adventure, the literary goods at his disposal were already somewhat musty in character. The year 1780, in which he reached London, marks the very nadir of English poetry. From the days of Elizabeth to our own there has never been so absolutely barren a period. People had become fairly tired of the jingle of Pope's imitators, and the new era had not dawned. Goldsmith and Gray, both recently dead, serve to illustrate the condition in which the most exquisite polish and refinement of language has been developed until there is a danger of sterility. The "Elegy" and the "Deserted Village"

are in their way inimitable poems: but we feel that the intellectual fibre of the poets has become dangerously delicate. The critical faculty could not be stimulated further without destroying all spontaneous impulse. The reaction to a more masculine and passionate school was imminent; and if the excellent Crabbe could have put into his box a few of Burns's lyrics, or even a copy of Cowper's "Task," one might have augured better for his prospects. But what chance was there for a man who could still be contentedly invoking the muse and stringing together mechanic echoes of Pope's couplets? How could he expect to charm the jaded faculties of a generation which was already beginning to heave and stir with a longing for some fresh excitement? For a year the fate which has overtaken so many rash literary adventurers seemed to be approaching steadily. One temporary gleam of good fortune cheered him for a time. He persuaded an enterprising publisher to bring out a poem called "The Candidate," which had some faint success, though ridiculed by the reviewers. Unluckily the publisher became bankrupt and Crabbe was thrown upon his resources—the poor three pounds and box of surgical instruments aforesaid. How he managed to hold out for a year is a mystery. It was lucky for him, as he

intimates, that he had never heard of the fate of Chatterton, who had poisoned himself just ten years before. A journal which he wrote for Mira is published in his Life, and gives an account of his feelings during three months of his cruel probation. He applies for a situation as amanuensis offered in an advertisement, and comforts himself on failing with the reflection that the advertiser was probably a sharper. He writes piteous letters to publishers, and gets, of course, the stereotyped reply with which the most amiable of publishers must damp the ardour of aspiring genius. The disappointment is not much softened by the publisher's statement that "he does not mean by this to insinuate any want of merit in the poem, but rather a want of attention in the public." Bit by bit his surgical instruments go to the pawnbroker. When one publisher sends his polite refusal poor Crabbe has only sixpence-farthing in the world, which, by the purchase of a pint of porter, is reduced to fourpence halfpenny. The exchequer fills again by the disappearance of his wardrobe and his watch; but ebbs under a new temptation. He buys some odd volumes of Dryden for three-and-sixpence, and on coming home tears his only coat, which he manages to patch tolerably with a borrowed needle and thread, pretending,

with a pathetic shift, that they are required to stitch together manuscripts instead of broadcloth. And so for a year the wolf creeps nearer to the door, whilst Crabbe gallantly keeps up appearances and spirits. And yet he tries to preserve a show of good spirits in the Journal to Mira, and continues to labour at his versemaking. Perhaps, indeed, it may be regarded as a bad symptom that he is reduced to distracting his mind by making an analysis of a dull sermon. "There is nothing particular in it," he admits, but at least it is better, he thinks, to listen to a bad sermon than to the blasphemous rant of deistical societies. Indeed, Crabbe's spirit was totally unlike the desperate pride of Chatterton. He was of the patient enduring tribe, and comforts himself by religious meditations, which are, perhaps, rather commonplace in expression, but when read by the light of the distresses he was enduring, show a brave and unembittered spirit, not to be easily respected too highly. Starvation seemed to be approaching; or, at least, the only alternative was the abandonment of his ambition, and acceptance, if he could get it, of the post of druggist's assistant. He had but one resource left; and that not of the most promising kind. Crabbe, amongst his other old-fashioned notions, had

a strong belief in the traditional patron. Johnson might have given him some hints upon the subject; but luckily, as it turned out, he pursued what Chesterfield's correspondent would have thought the most hopeless of all courses. He wrote to Lord North, who was at that moment occupied in contemplating the final results of the ingenious policy by which America was lost to England, and probably consigned Crabbe's letter to the waste-paper basket. Then he tried the effect of a copy of verses, beginning :—

> "Ah ! Shelburne, blest with all that's good or great,
> T' adorn a rich or save a sinking State."

He added a letter saying that as Lord North had not answered him, Lord Shelburne would probably be glad to supply the needs of a starving apothecary turned poet. Another copy of verses was enclosed, pointing out that Shelburne's reputed liberality would be repaid in the usual coin :

> "Then shall my grateful strains his ear rejoice,
> His name harmonious thrill'd on Mira's voice ;
> Round the reviving bays new sweets shall spring,
> And Shelburne's fame through laughing valleys ring ! "

Nobody can blame North and Shelburne for not acting the part of good Samaritans. He, at least, may throw

the first stone who has always taken the trouble to sift the grain from the chaff amidst all the begging letters which he has received, and who has never lamented that his benevolence outran his discretion. But there was one man in England at the time who had the rare union of qualities necessary for Crabbe's purpose. Burke is a name never to be mentioned without reverence; not only because Burke was incomparably the greatest of all English political writers, and, a standing refutation of the theory which couples rhetorical excellence with intellectual emptiness, but also because he was a man whose glowing hatred of all injustice and sympathy for all suffering never evaporated in empty words. His fine literary perception enabled him to detect the genuine excellence which underlay the superficial trivality of Crabbe's verses. He discovered the genius where men like North and Shelburne might excusably see nothing but the mendicant versifier; and a benevolence still rarer than his critical ability forbade him to satisfy his conscience by the sacrifice of a five-pound note. When, by the one happy thought of his life, Crabbe appealed to Burke's sympathy, the poet was desperately endeavouring to get a poem through the press. But he owed fourteen pounds, and every application to friends as poor as himself, and to patrons

upon whom he had no claims, had been unsuccessful. Nothing but ruin was before him. After writing to Burke he spent the night in pacing Westminster Bridge. The letter on which his fate hung is the more pathetic because it is free from those questionable poetical flourishes which had failed to conciliate his former patrons. It tells his story frankly and forcibly. Burke, however, was not a rich man, and was at one of the most exciting periods of his political career. His party was at last fighting its way to power by means of the general resentment against the gross mismanagement of their antagonists. A perfunctory discharge of the duty of charity would have been pardonable; but from the moment when Crabbe addressed Burke the poor man's fortune was made. Burke's glory rests upon services of much more importance to the world at large than even the preservation to the country of a man of genuine power. Yet there are few actions on which he could reflect with more unalloyed satisfaction; and the case is not a solitary one in Burke's history. A political triumph may often be only hastened a year or two by the efforts of even a great leader; but the salvage of a genius which would otherwise have been hopelessly wrecked in the deep waters of poverty is so much clear gain to mankind. One circumstance may be added as oddly charac-

teristic of Crabbe. He always spoke of his benefactor with becoming gratitude; and many years afterwards Moore and Rogers thought that they might extract some interesting anecdotes of the great author from the now celebrated poet. Burke, as we know, was a man whom you would discover to be remarkable if you stood with him for five minutes under a haystack in a shower. Crabbe stayed in his house for months under circumstances most calculated to be impressive. Burke was at the height of his power and reputation; he was the first man of any distinction whom the poet had ever seen; the two men had long and intimate conversations, and Crabbe, it may be added, was a very keen observer of character. And yet all that Rogers and Moore could extract from him was a few "vague generalities." Moore suggests some explanation; but the fact seems to be that Crabbe was one of those simple, homespun characters, whose interests were strictly limited to his own peculiar sphere. Burke, when he pleased, could talk of oxen as well as politics, and doubtless adapted his conversation to the taste of the young poet. Probably, much more was said about the state of Burke's farm than about the prospects of the Whig party. Crabbe's powers of vision were as limited as they were keen, and the great qualities to which Burke owed his reputation could only exhibit

themselves in a sphere to which Crabbe never rose. His attempt to draw a likeness of Burke under the name of "Eugenius," in the "Borough," is open to the objection that it would be nearly as applicable to Wilberforce, Howard, or Dr Johnson. It is a mere complimentary daub, in which every remarkable feature of the original is blurred or altogether omitted.

The inward Crabbe remained to the end of his days what nature and education had already made him; the outward Crabbe, by the help of Burke, rapidly put on a more prosperous appearance. His poems were published and achieved success. He took orders and found patrons. Thurlow gave him £100, and afterwards presented him to two small livings, growling out with an oath that he was "as like parson Adams as twelve to a dozen." The Duke of Rutland appointed him chaplain, a position in which he seems to have been singularly out of his element. Further patronage, however, made him independent, and he married his Mira and lived very happily ever afterwards. Perhaps, with his old-fashioned ideas, he would not quite have satisfied some clerical critics of the present day. His views about non-residence and pluralities seem to have been lax for the time; and his hearty dislike for dissent was coupled with a general dislike for enthusiasm of all kinds. He liked to ramble

about after flowers and fossils, and to hammer away at his poems in a study where chaos reigned supreme. For twenty-two years after his first success as an author, he never managed to get a poem into a state fit for publication, though periodical conflagrations of masses of manuscript—too vast to be burnt in the chimney—testified to his continuous industry. His reappearance seems to have been caused chiefly by his desire to send a son to the University. His success was repeated, though a new school had arisen which knew not Pope. The youth who had been kindly received by Burke, Reynolds, and Johnson, came back from his country retreat to be lionised at Holland House, and be petted by Brougham and Moore, and Rogers and Campbell, and all the rising luminaries. He paid a visit to Scott contemporaneously with George IV., and pottered about the queer old wynds and closes of Edinburgh, which he preferred to the New Town, and apparently to Arthur's Seat, with a judicious *caddie* following to keep him out of mischief. A more tangible kind of homage was the receipt of £3000 from Murray for his "Tales of the Hall," which so delighted him that he insisted on carrying the bills loose in his pocket till he could show them "to his son John" in the country. There, no doubt, he was most at home; and his parishioners gradually

became attached to their "parson Adams," in spite of his quaintnesses and some manful defiance of their prejudices. All women and children loved him, and he died at a good old age in 1832, having lived into a new order in many things, and been as little affected by the change as most men. The words with which he concludes the sketch of the Vicar in his "Borough" are not inappropriate to himself:—

> "Nor one so old has left this world of sin
> More like the being that he entered in."

The peculiar homeliness of Crabbe's character and poetry is excellently hit off in the "Rejected Addresses," and the lines beginning

> "John Richard William Alexander Dwyer
> Was footman to Justinian Stubbs, Esquire."

are probably more familiar to the present generation than any of the originals. "Pope in worsted stockings," is the title hit off for him by Horace Smith, and has about the same degree of truth as most smart sayings of the kind. The "worsted stockings" at least are characteristic. Crabbe's son and biographer indicates some of the surroundings of his father's early life in a description of the uncle, a Mr Tovell, with whom the poet's wife, the Mira of his Journal, passed

her youth. He was a sturdy yeoman, living in an old house with a moat, a rookery, and fishponds. The hall was paved with black and white marble, and the staircase was of black oak, slippery as ice, with a chiming-clock and a barrel-organ on the landing-places. The handsome drawing-room and dining-rooms were only used on grand occasions, such as the visit of a neighbouring peer. Mrs Tovell jealously reserved for herself the duty of scrubbing these state apartments, and sent any servant to the right-about who dared to lay unhallowed hands upon them. The family sat habitually in the old-fashioned kitchen, by a huge open chimney, where the blaze of a whole pollard sometimes eclipsed the feeble glimmer of the single candle in an iron candlestick, intended to illuminate Mrs Tovell's labours with the needle. Masters and servants, with any travelling tinker or ratcatcher, all dined together, and the nature of their meals has been described by Crabbe himself:—

> "But when the men beside their station took,
> The maidens with them, and with these the cook;
> When one huge wooden bowl before them stood,
> Fill'd with huge balls of farinaceous food;
> With bacon, mass saline, where never lean
> Beneath the brown and bristly rind was seen;
> When from a single horn the party drew
> Their copious draughts of heavy ale and new;"

then, the poet goes on to intimate, squeamish persons might feel a little uncomfortable. After dinner followed a nap of precisely one hour. Then bottles appeared on the table, and neighbouring farmers, with faces rosy with brandy, drifted in for a chat. One of these heroes never went to bed sober, but scandalised all teetotallers by retaining all his powers and coursing after he was ninety. Bowl after bowl of punch was emptied, and the conversation took so convivial a character that Crabbe generally found it expedient to withdraw, though his son, who records these performances, was held to be too young to be injured, and the servants were too familiar for their presence to be a restraint.

It was in this household that the poet found his Mira. Crabbe's own father was apparently at a lower point of the social scale; and during his later years took to drinking and to flinging dishes about the room whenever he was out of temper. Crabbe always drew from the life; most of his characters might have joined in his father's drinking bouts, or told stories over Mr Tovell's punchbowls. Doubtless a social order of the same kind survived till a later period in various corners of the island. The Tovells of to-day get their fashions from London, and their labourers, instead of dining

with them in their kitchen, have taken to forming unions and making speeches about their rights. If, here and there, in some remote nooks we find an approximation to the coarse, hearty, patriarchal mode of life, we regard it as a naturalist regards a puny modern reptile, the representative of gigantic lizards of old geological epochs. A sketch or two of its peculiarities, sufficiently softened and idealised to suit modern tastes, forms a picturesque background to a modern picture. Some of Miss Brontë's rough Yorkshiremen would have drunk punch with Mr Tovell; and the farmers in the "Mill on the Floss" are representatives of the same race, slightly degenerate, in so far as they are just conscious that a new cause of disturbance is setting into the quiet rural districts. Dandie Dinmont again is a relation of Crabbe's heroes, though the fresh air of the Cheviots and the stirring traditions of the old border life have conferred upon him a more poetical colouring. To get a realistic picture of country life as Crabbe saw it, we must go back to Squire Western, or to some of the roughly-hewn masses of flesh who sat to Hogarth. Perhaps it may be said that Miss Austen's delicate portrait of the more polished society, which took the waters at Bath, and occasionally paid a visit to London, im-

plies a background of coarser manners and more brutal passions, which lay outside her peculiar province. The question naturally occurs to social philosophers, whether the improvement in the external decencies of life and the wider intellectual horizon of modern days proves a genuine advance over the rude and homely plenty of an earlier generation. I refer to such problems only to remark that Crabbe must be consulted by those who wish to look upon the seamy side of the time which he describes. He very soon dropped his nymphs and shepherds, and ceased to invoke the idyllic muse. In his long portrait gallery there are plenty of virtuous people, and some people intended to be refined; but features indicative of coarse animal passions, brutality, selfishness, and sensuality are drawn to the life, and the development of his stories is generally determined by some of the baser elements of human nature. "Jesse and Colin" are described in one of the Tales; but they are not the Jesse and Colin of Dresden china. They are such rustics as ate fat bacon and drank "heavy ale and new;" not the imaginary personages who exchanged amatory civilities in the old-fashioned pastorals ridiculed by Pope and Gay.

Crabbe's rough style is indicative of his general temper. It is in places at least the most slovenly and slip-

shod that was ever adopted by any true poet. The authors of the "Rejected Addresses" had simply to copy, without attempting the impossible task of caricaturing. One of their familiar couplets, for example, runs thus:—

> "Emmanuel Jennings brought his youngest boy
> Up as a corn-cutter, a safe employ!"

And here is the original Crabbe:—

> "Swallow, a poor attorney, brought his boy
> Up at his desk, and gave him his employ."

When boy cannot be made to rhyme with employ, Crabbe is very fond of dragging in a hoy. In the "Parish Register", he introduces a narrative about a village grocer and his friend in these lines:—

> "Aged were both, that Dawkins, Ditchem this,
> Who much of marriage thought and much amiss."

Or to quote one more opening of a story:—

> "Counter and Clubb were men in trade, whose pains,
> Credit, and prudence, brought them constant gains;
> Partners and punctual, every friend agreed
> Counter and Clubb were men who must succeed."

But of such gems any one may gather as many as he pleases by simply turning over Crabbe's pages. In one

sense, they are rather pleasant than otherwise. They are so characteristic and put forward with such absolute simplicity that they have the same effect as a good old provincialism in the mouth of a genuine countryman. It must, however, be admitted that Crabbe's careful study of Pope had not initiated him in some of his master's secrets. The worsted stockings were uncommonly thick. If Pope's brilliance of style savours too much of affectation, Crabbe never manages to hit off an epigram in the whole of his poetry. The language seldom soars above the style which would be intelligible to the merest clodhopper; and we can understand how, when in his later years Crabbe was introduced to wits and men of the world, he generally held his peace, or, at most, let fall some bit of dry quiet humour. At rare intervals he remembers that a poet ought to indulge in a figure of speech, and laboriously compounds a simile which appears in his poetry like a bit of gold lace on a farmer's homespun coat. He confessed as much in answer to a shrewd criticism of Jeffery's, saying that he generally thought of such illustrations and inserted them after he had finished his tale. Here is one of these deliberately-concocted ornaments, intended to explain the remark that the difference between the character of

two brothers came out when they were living together quietly :—

> "As various colours in a painted ball,
> While it has rest are seen distinctly all ;
> Till, whirl'd around by some exterior force,
> They all are blended in the rapid course ;
> So in repose and not by passion swayed
> We saw the difference by their habits made ;
> But, tried by strong emotions, they became
> Filled with one love, and were in heart the same."

The conceit is ingenious enough in one sense, but painfully ingenious. It requires some thought to catch the likeness suggested, and then it turns out to be purely superficial. The resemblance of such a writer to Pope obviously does not go deep. Crabbe imitates Pope because everybody imitated him at that day. He adopted Pope's metre because it had come to be almost the only recognised means of poetical expression. He stuck to it after his contemporaries had introduced new versification, partly because he was old-fashioned to the backbone and partly because he had none of those lofty inspirations which naturally generate new forms of melody. He seldom trusts himself to be lyrical, and when he does his versification is nearly as monotonous

as in his narrative poetry. We must not expect to soar with Crabbe into any of the loftier regions; to see the world "apparelled in celestial light," or to descry

> "Such forms as glitter in the muses' ray,
> With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun."

We shall find no vehement outbursts of passion, breaking loose from the fetters of sacred convention. Crabbe is perfectly content with the British Constitution, with the Thirty-nine Articles, and all respectabilities in Church and State, and therefore he is quite content also with the good old jogtrot of the recognised metres; his language, halting invariably, and for the most part clumsy enough, is sufficiently differentiated from prose by the mould into which it is run, and he never wants to kick over the traces with his more excitable contemporaries.

> "The good old rule
> Sufficeth him, the simple plan"

that each verse should consist of ten syllables, with an occasional Alexandrine to accommodate a refractory epithet, and should rhyme peaceably with its neighbour.

From all which it may be too harshly inferred that Crabbe is merely a writer in rhyming prose, and deserving of no attention from the more enlightened

adherents of a later school. The inference, I say, would be hasty, for it is impossible to read Crabbe patiently without receiving a very distinct and original impression. If some pedants of æsthetic philosophy should declare that we ought not to be impressed because Crabbe breaks all their rules, we can only reply that they are mistaking their trade. The true business of the critic is to discover from observation what are the conditions under which art appeals to our sympathies, and, if he finds an apparent exception to his rules, to admit that he has made an oversight, and not to condemn the facts which persist in contradicting his theories. It may, indeed, be freely granted that Crabbe has suffered seriously by his slovenly methods and his insensibility to the more exquisite and ethereal forms of poetical excellence. But however he may be classified, he possesses the essential mark of genius, namely, that his pictures, however coarse the workmanship, stamp themselves on our minds indelibly and instantaneously. His pathos is here and there clumsy, but it goes straight to the mark. His characteristic qualities were first distinctly shown in the "Village," which was partly composed under Burke's eye, and was more or less touched by Johnson. It was, indeed, a work after Johnson's own heart, intended to be a

pendant, or perhaps a corrective, to Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." It is meant to give the bare blank facts of rural life, stripped of all sentimental gloss. To read the two is something like hearing a speech from an optimist landlord and then listening to the comments of Mr Arch. Goldsmith, indeed, was far too exquisite an artist to indulge in mere conventionalities about agricultural bliss. If his "Auburn" is rather idealised, the most prosaic of critics cannot object to the glow thrown by the memory of the poet over the scene of now ruined happiness, and, moreover, Goldsmith's delicate humour guards him instinctively from laying on his rose-colour too thickly. Crabbe, however, will have nothing to do with rose-colour, thick or thin. There is one explicit reference in the poem to his predecessor's work, and it is significant. Everybody remembers, or ought to remember, Goldsmith's charming pastor, to whom it can only be objected that he has not the fear of political economists before his eyes. This is Crabbe's retort, after describing a dying pauper in need of spiritual consolation :—

> "And does not he, the pious man, appear,
> He, 'passing rich with forty pounds a year?'
> Ah! no; a shepherd of a different stock,
> And far unlike him, feeds this little flock:

A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task
As much as God or man can fairly ask;
The rest he gives to loves and labours light,
To fields the morning, and to feasts the night.
None better skilled the noisy pack to guide,
To urge their chase, to cheer them, or to chide;
A sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,
And, skilled at whist, devotes the night to play."

This fox-hunting parson (of whom Cowper has described a duplicate) lets the pauper die as he pleases; and afterwards allows him to be buried without attending, performing the funerals, it seems, in a lump upon Sundays. Crabbe admits in a note that such negligence was uncommon, but adds that it is not unknown. The flock is, on the whole, worthy of the shepherd. The old village sports have died out in favour of smuggling and wrecking. The poor are not, as rich men fancy, healthy and well fed. Their work makes them premature victims to ague and rheumatism; their food is

"Homely, not wholesome, plain, not plenteous, such
As you who praise would never deign to touch."

The ultimate fate of the worn-out labourer is the poorhouse, described in lines, of which it is enough to say that Scott and Wordsworth learnt them by

heart, and the melancholy death-bed already noticed. Are we reading a poem or a Blue Book done into rhyme? may possibly be the question of some readers. The answer should perhaps be that a good many Blue Books contain an essence which only requires to be properly extracted and refined to become genuine poetry. If Crabbe's verses retain rather too much of the earthly elements, he is capable of transmuting his minerals into genuine gold, as well as of simply collecting them. Nothing, for example, is more characteristic than the mode in which the occasional descriptions of nature are harmoniously blended with the human life in his poetry. Crabbe is an ardent lover of a certain type of scenery, to which justice has not often been done. We are told how, after a long absence from Suffolk, he rode sixty miles from his house to have a dip in the sea. Some of his poems appear to be positively impregnated with a briny, or rather perhaps a tarry odour. The sea which he loved was by no means a Byronic sea. It has no grandeur of storm, and still less has it the Mediterranean blue. It is the sluggish muddy element which washes the flat shores of his beloved Suffolk. He likes even the shelving beach, with fishermen's boats and decaying nets and remnants of

stale fish. He loves the dreary estuary, where the slow tide sways backwards and forwards, and whence

> "High o'er the restless deep, above the reach
> Of gunner's hope, vast flocks of wildfowl stretch."

The coming generation of poets took to the mountains; but Crabbe remained faithful to the dismal and yet, in his hands, the impressive scenery of his native salt-marshes. His method of description suits the country. His verses never become melodramatic, nor does he ever seem to invest nature with the mystic life of Wordsworth's poetry. He gives the plain prosaic facts which impress us because they are in such perfect harmony with the sentiment. Here, for example, is a fragment from the "Village," which is simply a description of the neighbourhood of Aldborough:—

> "Lo! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
> Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor;
> From thence a length of burning sand appears,
> Where the thin harvest waves its withered ears;
> Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
> Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye;
> There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
> And to the ragged infant threatens war;
> There poppies nodding, mock the hope of toil;
> There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil;

Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf ;
O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade."

The writer is too obviously a botanist; but the picture always remains with us as the only conceivable background for the poverty-stricken population whom he is about to describe. The actors in the "Borough" are presented to us in a similar setting; and it may be well to put a sea-piece beside this bit of barren common. Crabbe's range of descriptive power is pretty well confined within the limits so defined. He is scarcely at home beyond the tide-marks :—

"Be it the summer noon ; a sandy space
The ebbing tide has left upon its place ;
Then just the hot and stony beach above,
Light twinkling streams in bright confusion move ;
. . . . . .
There the broad bosom of the ocean keeps
An equal motion ; swelling as it sleeps,
Then slowly sinking ; curling to the strand,
Faint lazy waves o'ercreep the ridgy sand,
Or tap the tarry boat with gentle blow,
And back return in silence, smooth and slow.
Ships in the calm seem anchored : for they glide
On the still sea, urged slowly by the tide :

> Art thou not present, this calm scene before
> Where all beside is pebbly length of shore,
> And far as eye can reach, it can discern no more?"

I have omitted a couplet which verges on the scientific; for Crabbe is unpleasantly anxious to leave nothing unexplained. The effect is, in its way, perfect. Any one who pleases may compare it with Wordsworth's calm in the verses upon Peele Castle, where the sentiment is given without the minute statement of facts, and where, too, we have the inevitable quotation about the "light that never was on sea or land," and is pretty nearly as rare in Crabbe's poetry. What he sees, we can all see, though not so intensely; and his art consists in selecting the precise elements that tell most forcibly towards bringing us into the required frame of mind. To enjoy Crabbe fully, we ought perhaps to be acclimatised on the coast of the eastern counties; we should become sensitive to the plaintive music of the scenery, which is now generally drowned by the discordant sounds of modern watering-places, and would seem insipid to a generation which values excitement in scenery as in fiction. Readers, who measure the beauty of a district by its average height above the sea-level, and who cannot appreciate the

charm of a "waste enormous marsh," may find Crabbe uncongenial.

The human character is determined, as Mr Buckle and other philosophers have assured us, by the climate and the soil. A little ingenuity, such as those philosophers display in accommodating facts to theory, might discover a parallel between the type of Crabbe's personages and the fauna and flora of his native district. Declining a task which might lead to fanciful conclusions, I may assume that the East Anglian character is sufficiently familiar, whatever the causes by which it has been determined. To define Crabbe's poetry we have simply to imagine ourselves listening to the stories of his parishioners, told by a clergyman brought up amongst the lower rank of the middle classes, scarcely elevated above their prejudices, and not willingly leaving their circle of ideas. We must endow him with that simplicity of character which gives us frequent cause to smile at its proprietor, but which does not disqualify him from seeing a great deal further into his neighbours than they are apt to give him credit for doing. Such insight, in fact, is due not to any great subtlety of intellect, but to the possession of deep feeling and sympathy. Crabbe saw little more of Burke than would have been visible to an ordinary

Suffolk farmer. When transplanted to a ducal mansion, he only drew the pretty obvious inference, embodied in a vigorous poem, that a patron is a very disagreeable and at times a very mischievous personage. The joys and griefs which really interest him are of the very tangible and solid kind which affect men and women to whom the struggle for existence is a stern reality. Here and there his good-humoured but rather clumsy ridicule may strike some lady to whom some demon has whispered "have a taste;" and who turns up her nose at the fat bacon on Mr Tovell's table. He pities her squeamishness, but thinks it rather unreasonable. He satirises too the heads of the rustic aristocracy; the brutal squire who bullies his nephew the clergyman for preaching against his vices, and corrupts the whole neighbourhood; or the speculative banker who cheats old maids under pretence of looking after their investments. If the squire does not generally appear in Crabbe in the familiar dramatic character of a rural Lovelace, it is chiefly because Crabbe has no great belief in the general purity of the inferior ranks of rural life. But his most powerful stories deal with the tragedies—only too lifelike—of the shop and the farm. He describes the temptations which lead the small tradesman to adulterate his goods, or the parish clerk

to embezzle the money subscribed in the village church, and the evil influence of dissenting families in fostering a spiritual pride which leads to more unctuous hypocrisy; for though he says of the wicked squire, that

> "His worship ever was a Churchman true,
> And held in scorn the Methodistic crew."

the scorn is only objectionable to him in so far as it is a cynical cloak for scorn of good morals. He tells how boys run away to sea, or join strolling players, and have in consequence to beg their bread at the end of their days. The almshouse or the country gaol is the natural end of his villains, and he paints to the life the evil courses which generally lead to such a climax. Nobody describes better the process of going to the dogs. And most of all, he sympathises with the village maiden who has listened too easily to the voice of the charmer, in the shape of a gay sailor or a smart London footman, and has to reap the bitter consequences of her too easy faith. Most of his stories might be paralleled by the experience of any country clergyman who has entered into the life of his parishioners. They are as commonplace and as pathetic as the things which are happening round us every day, and which fill a neglected paragraph in a country newspaper. The

treatment varies from the purely humorous to the most deep and genuine pathos ; though it never takes us into the regions of the loftier imagination.

The more humorous of these performances may be briefly dismissed. Crabbe possesses the faculty, but not in any eminent degree ; his hand is a little heavy, and one must remember that Mr Tovell and his like were of the race who require to have a joke driven into their heads with a sledge-hammer. Once or twice we come upon a sketch which may help to explain Miss Austen's admiration. There is an old maid devoted to Mira, and rejoicing in stuffed puppies and parrots, who might have been ridiculed by Emma Woodhouse, and a parson who would have suited the Eltons admirably :—

> " Fiddling and fishing were his arts ; at times
> He altered sermons and he aimed at rhymes ;
> And his fair friends, not yet intent on cards,
> Oft he amused with riddles and charades."

Such sketches are a pleasant relief to his more sombre portraiture ; but it is in the tragic elements that his true power comes out. The motives of his stories may be trivial, but never the sentiment. The deep manly emotion makes us forget not only the frequent clumsiness of his style but the pettiness of

the incident, and, what is more difficult, the rather bread-and-butter tone of morality. If he is a little too fond of bringing his villains to the gallows, he is pre-occupied less by the external consequences than by the natural working of evil passions. With him sin is not punished by being found out, but by disintegrating the character and blunting the higher sensibilities. He shows—and the moral, if not new, is that which possesses the really intellectual interest—how evil-doers are tortured by the cravings of desires that cannot be satisfied, and the lacerations inflicted by ruined self-respect. And therefore there is a truth in Crabbe's delineations which is quite independent of his more or less rigid administration of poetical justice. His critics used to accuse him of having a low opinion of human nature. It is quite true that he assigns to selfishness and brutal passion a very large part in carrying on the machinery of the world. Some readers may infer that he was unlucky in his experience, and others that he loved facts too unflinchingly. His stories sometimes remind one of Balzac's in the descriptions of selfishness triumphant over virtue. One, for example, of his deeply pathetic poems is called the "Brothers;" and repeats the old contrast given in Fielding's Tom Jones and Blifil. The

shrewd sly hypocrite has received all manner of kindnesses from the generous and simple sailor, and when, at last, the poor sailor is ruined in health and fortune, he comes home expecting to be supported by the gratitude of the brother, who has by this time made money and is living at his ease. Nothing can be more pathetic or more in the spirit of some of Balzac's stories than the way in which the rich man receives his former benefactor; his faint recognition of fraternal feelings gradually cools down under the influence of a selfish wife; till at last the poor old sailor is driven from the parlour to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the loft, and finally deprived of his only comfort, his intercourse with a young nephew not yet broken into hardness of heart, on the plea that the lad is not to be corrupted by the coarse language of his poor old uncle. The rich brother suspects that the sailor has broken this rule, and is reviling him for his ingratitude, when suddenly he discovers that he is abusing a corpse. The old sailor's heart is broken at last; and his brother repents too late. He tries to comfort his remorse by cross-examining the boy, who was the cause of the last quarrel:—

"'Did he not curse me, child?' 'He never cursed,
But could not breathe, and said his heart would burst.'

> 'And so will mine'——'But, father, you must pray;
> My uncle said it took his pains away.'"

Praying, however, cannot bring back the dead; and the fratricide, for such he feels himself to be, is a melancholy man to the end of his days. In Balzac's hands repentance would have had no place, and selfishness been finally triumphant and unabashed. We need not ask which would be the most effective or the truest treatment; though I must put in a word for the superior healthiness of Crabbe's mind. There is nothing morbid about him. Still it would be absurd to push such a comparison far. Crabbe's portraits are only spirited vignettes compared with the elaborate full-lengths drawn by the intense imagination of the French novelist; and Crabbe's whole range of thought is infinitely narrower. The two writers have a real resemblance only in so far as in each case a powerful accumulation of life-like details enables them to produce a pathos, powerful by its vivid reality.

The singular power of Crabbe is in some sense more conspicuous in the stories where the incidents are almost audaciously trifling. One of them begins with this not very impressive and very ungrammatical couplet:—

"With our late Vicar, and his age the same,
His clerk, hight Jachin, to his office came."

Jachin is a man of oppressive respectability; so oppressive, indeed, that some of the scamps of the borough try to get him into scrapes by temptations of a very inartificial kind, which he is strong enough to resist. At last, however, it occurs to Jachin that he can easily embezzle part of the usual monthly offerings while saving his character in his own eyes by some obvious sophistry. He is detected and dismissed, and dies after coming upon the parish. These materials for a tragic poem are not very promising; and I do not mean to say that the sorrows of poor Jachin affect us as deeply as those of Gretchen or Desdemona. The parish clerk is perhaps a fit type of all that was least poetical in the old social order of the country, and virtue which succumbs to the temptation of taking two shillings out of a plate scarcely wants a Mephistophiles to overcome it. We may perhaps think that the apologetic note which the excellent Crabbe inserts at the end of his poem, to the effect that he did not mean by it to represent mankind as "puppets of an overpowering destiny," or "to deny the doctrine of seducing spirits," is a little superfluous. The fact that a parish-clerk has

taken to petty pilfering can scarcely justify those heterodox conclusions. But when we have smiled at Crabbe's philosophy, we begin to wonder at the force of his sentiment. A blighted human soul is a pathetic object, however paltry the temptation to which it has succumbed. Jachin has the dignity of despair, though he is not quite a fallen archangel; and Crabbe's favourite scenery harmonises with his agony.

> "In each lone place, dejected and dismay'd,
> Shrinking from view, his wasting form he laid;
> Or to the restless sea and roaring wind
> Gave the strong yearnings of a ruined mind;
> On the broad beach, the silent summer day,
> Stretch'd on some wreck, he wore his life away;
> Or where the river mingles with the sea,
> Or on the mud-bank by the elder tree,
> Or by the bounding marsh-dyke, there was he."

Nor would he have been a more pitiable object if he had betrayed a nation or sold his soul for a garter instead of the pillage of a subscription plate. Poor old Jachin's story may seem to be borrowed from a commonplace tract; but the detected pilferer, though he has only lost the respect of the parson, the overseer, and the beadle, touches us as deeply as the Byronic hero who has fallen out with the whole system of the world.

If we refuse to sympathise with the pang due to so petty a catastrophe—though our sympathy should surely be proportioned to the keenness of the suffering rather than the absolute height of the fall—we may turn to tragedy of a deeper dye. Peter Grimes, as his name indicates, was a ruffian from his infancy. He once knocked down his poor old father, who warned him of the consequences of his brutality :—

> "On an inn-settle, in his maudlin grief,
> This he revolved, and drank for his relief."

Adopting such a remedy, he sank from bad to worse, and gradually became a thief, a smuggler, and a social outlaw. In those days, however, as is proved by the history of Mrs Brownrigg, parish authorities practised the "boarding-out system" after a reckless fashion. Peter was allowed to take two or three apprentices in succession, whom he bullied, starved, and maltreated, and who finally died under suspicious circumstances. The last was found dead in Peter's fishing-boat after a rough voyage; and though nothing could be proved, the Mayor told him that he should have no more slaves to belabour. Peter, pursuing his trade in solitude, gradually became morbid and depressed. The melancholy estuary became haunted

by ghostly visions. He had to groan and sweat with no vent for his passion :—

> "Thus by himself compelled to live each day,
> To wait for certain hours the tide's delay;
> At the same time the same dull views to see,
> The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree;
> The water only, when the tides were high,
> When low, the mud half-covered and half-dry;
> The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,
> And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks;
> Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,
> As the tide rolls by the impeded boat."

Peter grew more sullen, and the scenery became more weird and depressing. The few who watched him remarked that there were three places where Peter seemed to be more than usually moved. For a time he hurried past them, whistling as he rowed; but gradually he seemed to be fascinated. The idle lodgers in the summer saw a man and boat lingering in the tideway, apparently watching the gliding waves without casting a net or looking at the wildfowl. At last, his delirium becoming stronger, he is carried to the poorhouse, and tells his story to the clergyman. Nobody has painted with greater vigour that kind of externalised conscience which may still survive in a brutalised mind. Peter Grimes, of course, sees

his victims' spirits and hates them. He fancies that his father torments him out of spite, characteristically forgetting that the ghost had some excuse for his anger :—

> "'Twas one hot noon, all silent, still, serene,
> No living being had I lately seen ;
> I paddled up and down and dipped my net,
> But (such his pleasure) I could nothing get,—
> A father's pleasure, when his toil was done,
> To plague and torture thus an only son !
> And so I sat and looked upon the stream,
> How it ran on, and felt as in a dream ;
> But dream it was not ; no !—I fixed my eyes
> On the mid stream and saw the spirits rise ;
> I saw my father on the water stand,
> And hold a thin pale boy in either hand ;
> And there they glided ghastly on the top
> Of the salt flood, and never touched a drop ;
> I would have struck them, but they knew the intent,
> And smiled upon the oar, and down they went."

Remorse in Peter's mind takes the shape of bitter hatred for his victims ; and with another characteristic confusion, he partly attributes his sufferings to some evil influence intrinsic in the locality :—

> "There were three places, where they ever rose,—
> The whole long river has not such as those,—
> Places accursed, where, if a man remain,
> He'll see the things which strike him to the brain."

And then the malevolent ghosts forced poor Peter to lean on his oars, and showed him visions of coming horrors. Grimes dies impenitent, and fancying that his tormentors are about to seize him. Of all haunted men in fiction, it is not easy to think of a case where the horror is more terribly realised. The blood-boulter'd Banquo tortured a noble victim, but scarcely tortured him more effectually. Peter Grimes was doubtless a close relation of Peter Bell. Bell having the advantage of Wordsworth's interpretation, leads us to many thoughts which lie altogether beyond Crabbe's reach; but, looking simply at the sheer tragic force of the two characters, Grimes is to Bell what brandy is to small beer. He would never have shown the white feather like his successor, who,

> "After ten months' melancholy,
> Became a good and honest man."

If, in some sense, Peter Grimes is the most effective of Crabbe's heroes, he would, if taken alone, give a very distorted impression of the general spirit of the poetry. It is only at intervals that he introduces us to downright criminals. There is, indeed, a description of a convicted felon, which, according to Macaulay, has made "many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child," and

which, if space were unlimited, would make a striking pendant to the agony of the burdened Grimes. But, as a rule, Crabbe can find motives enough for tenderness in sufferings which have nothing to do with the criminal law, and of which the mere framework of the story is often interesting enough. His peculiar power is best displayed in so presenting to us the sorrows of commonplace characters as to make us feel that a shabby coat and a narrow education, and the most unromantic of characters, need not cut off our sympathies with a fellow-creature; and that the dullest tradesman who treads on our toes in an omnibus may want only a power of articulate expression to bring before us some of the deepest of all problems. The parish clerk and the grocer—or whatever may be the proverbial epitome of human dulness—may swell the chorus of lamentation over the barrenness and the hardships and the wasted energies and the harsh discords of life which is always "steaming up" from the world, and to which it is one, though perhaps not the highest, of the poet's functions to make us duly sensible. Crabbe, like all realistic writers, must be studied at full length, and therefore quotations are necessarily unjust. It will be sufficient if I refer—pretty much at random—to the short stories of "Phœbe Dawson" in the "Parish Register," to the

more elaborate stories of "Edward Shore" and the "Parting Hour" in the "Tales," or to the story of "Ruth" in the "Tales of the Hall," where again the dreary pathos is strangely heightened by Crabbe's favourite seaport scenery, to prove that he might be called as truly as Goldsmith *affectuum potens*, though scarcely *lenis, dominator*.

It is time, however, to conclude by a word or two, as to Crabbe's peculiar place in the history of English literature. I said that, unlike his contemporaries, Cowper and Burns, he adhered rigidly to the form of the earlier eighteenth century school, and partly for this reason excited the wayward admiration of Byron, who always chose to abuse the bridge which carried him to fame. But Crabbe's clumsiness of expression makes him a very inadequate successor of Pope or of Goldsmith, and his claims are really founded on the qualities which led Byron to call him "nature's sternest painter, yet her best." On this side he is connected with some tendencies of the school which supplanted his early models. So far as Wordsworth and his followers represented the reaction from the artificial to a love of unsophisticated nature, Crabbe is entirely at one with them. He did not share that unlucky taste for the namby-pamby by which Wordsworth annoyed

his contemporaries, and spoilt some of his earlier poems. Its place was filled in Crabbe's mind by an even more unfortunate disposition for the simply humdrum and commonplace, which, it must be confessed, makes it almost as hard to read a good many of his verses as to consume large quantities of suet pudding, and has probably destroyed his popularity with the present generation. Still, Crabbe's influence was powerful as against the old conventionality. He did not, like his predecessors, write upon the topics which interested "persons of quality," and never gives us the impression of having composed his rhymes in a full-bottomed wig or even in a Grub Street garret. He has gone out into country fields and village lanes, and paints directly from man and nature, with almost a cynical disregard of the accepted code of propriety. But the points on which he parts company with his more distinguished contemporaries is equally obvious. Mr Stopford Brooke has lately been telling us with great eloquence what is the theology which underlies the poetical tendencies of the last generation of poets. Of that creed, a sufficiently vague one, it must be admitted, Crabbe was by no means an apostle. Rather one would say he was as indifferent as a good old-fashioned clergyman could very well be to the existence

of any new order of ideas in the world. The infidels, whom he sometimes attacks, read Bolingbroke, and Chubb, and Mandeville, and have only heard by report even of the existence of Voltaire. The Dissenters, whom he so heartily detests, have listened to Whitefield and Wesley, or perhaps to Huntington, S.S.—that is, as it may now be necessary to explain, Sinner Saved. Every newer development of thought was still far away from the quiet pews of Aldborough, and the only form of Church restoration of which he has heard is the objectionable practice of painting a new wall to represent a growth of lichens. Crabbe appreciates the charm of the picturesque, but has never yet heard of our elaborate methods of creating modern antiques. Lapped in such ignorance, and with a mind little given to speculation, it is only in character that Crabbe should be totally insensible to the various moods of thought represented by Wordsworth's pantheistic conceptions of nature, or by Shelley's dreamy idealism, or Byron's fierce revolutionary impulses. Still less, if possible, could he sympathise with that love of beauty, pure and simple, of which Keats was the first prophet. He might, indeed, be briefly described by saying that he is at the very opposite pole from Keats. The more bigoted admirers of Keats—for there are

bigots in all matters of taste or poetry as well as in science or theology or politics—would refuse the title of poet to Crabbe altogether on the strength of the absence of this element from his verses. Like his most obvious parallels in painting, he is too fond of boors and pothouses to be allowed the quality of artistic perception. I will not argue the point, which is, perhaps, rather a question of classification than of intrinsic merit; but I will venture to suggest a test which will, I think, give Crabbe a very firm, though, it may be, not a very lofty place. Though I should be unwilling to be reckoned as one of Macaulay's "rough and cynical readers," I admit that I can read the story of the convicted felon, or of Peter Grimes, without indulging in downright blubbering. Most readers, I fear, can in these days get through pathetic poems and novels without absolutely using their pocket-handkerchiefs. But though Crabbe may not prompt such outward and visible signs of emotion, I think that he produces a more distinct titillation of the lachrymatory glands than almost any poet of his time. True, he does not appeal to emotions, accessible only through the finer intellectual perceptions, or to the thoughts which "lie too deep for tears." That prerogative belongs to men of more intense character, greater

philosophical power, and more delicate instincts. But the power of touching readers by downright pictures of homespun griefs and sufferings is one which, to my mind, implies some poetical capacity, and which clearly belongs to Crabbe.

VII.

WILLIAM HAZLITT.

THERE are few great books or great men that do not sadden us by a sense of incompleteness. The writer, we feel, is better than his work. His full power only reveals itself by flashes. There are blemishes in his design, due to mere oversight or indolence; his energy has flagged, or he has alloyed his pure gold to please the mob; or some burst of wayward passion has disturbed the fair proportions of his work, and the man himself is a half-finished or half-ruined fragment. The rough usage of the world leaves its mark on the spiritual constitution of even the strongest and best amongst us; and perhaps the finest natures suffer more than others in virtue of their finer sympathies. "Hamlet" is a pretty good performance, if we make allowances; but what would it have been if Shakspeare could have been at his highest level all through, and if every element of strength in him had been purified from

every weakness? What would it have been, shall we say, if he could have had the advantage of reading a few modern lectures on æsthetics? We may, perhaps, be content with Shakspeare as circumstances left him; but in reading our modern poets, the sentiment of regret is stronger. If Byron had not been driven into his wild revolt against the world; if Shelley had been judiciously treated from his youth; if Keats had had healthier lungs; if Wordsworth had not grown rusty in his solitude; if Scott had not been tempted into publishers' speculations; if Coleridge had never taken to opium; what great poems might not have opened the new era of literature, where now we have but incomplete designs, and listen to harmonies half destroyed by internal discord? The regret, however, is less when a man has succeeded in uttering the thought that was in him, though it may never have found a worthy expression. Wordsworth could have told us little more though the "Excursion" had been as complete a work as "Paradise Lost;" and if Scott might have written more "Waverleys" and "Antiquaries" and "Old Mortalities," he could hardly have written better ones. But the works of some other writers suggest possibilities which never even approached fulfilment. If the opinion formed by his contemporaries of Coleridge

be anywhere near the truth, we lost in him a potential philosopher of a very high order, as we more clearly lost a poet of singular fascination. Coleridge naturally suggests the name of De Quincey, whose works are as often tantalising as satisfying. And to make, it is true, a considerable drop from the greatest of these names, we often feel when we take up one of Hazlitt's glowing Essays, that here, too, was a man who might have made a far more enduring mark as a writer of English prose. At their best, his writings are admirable; they have the true stamp; the thought is masculine and the expression masterly; phrases engrave themselves on the memory; and we catch glimpses of a genuine thinker and no mere manufacturer of literary commonplace. On a more prolonged study, it is true, we become conscious of many shortcomings, and the general effect is somehow rather cloying, though hardly from an excess of sweetness. And yet he deserves the study both of the critic and the student of character.

The story of Hazlitt's life has been told by his grandson; but there is a rather curious defect of materials for so recent a biography. He kept, it seems, no letters—a weakness, if it be a weakness, for which one is rather apt to applaud him in these

days; but, on the other hand, nobody ever indulged more persistently in the habit of washing his dirty linen in public. Not even his idol Rousseau could be more demonstrative of his feelings and recollections. His Essays are autobiographical, sometimes even offensively; and after reading them we are even more familiar than his contemporaries with many points of his character. He loved to pour himself out in his Essays

> "As plain
> As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne."

He has laid bare for the most careless reader the main elements of his singular composition. Like some others of his revolutionary friends, Godwin, for example, Leigh Hunt, and Tom Paine, he represents the old dissenting spirit in a new incarnation. The grandfather a stern Calvinist, the father a Unitarian, the son a freethinker; those were the gradations through which more than one family passed during the closing years of the last century and the opening of this. One generation still clung to the old Puritan traditions and Jonathan Edwards; the next followed Priestley; and the third joined the little band of radicals who read Cobbett, scorned Southey as a deserter, and refused to be frightened by the French

revolution. The outside crust of opinion may be shed with little change to the inner man. Hazlitt was a dissenter to his backbone. He was born to be in a minority; to be a living protest against the dominant creed and constitution. He recognised and denounced, but he never shook off, the faults characteristic of small sects. A want of wide intellectual culture, and a certain sourness of temper, cramped his powers and sometimes marred his writing. But from his dissenting forefathers Hazlitt inherited something better. Beside the huge tomes of controversial divinity on his father's shelves, the "Patres Poloni," Pripscovius, Crellius, and Cracovius, Lardner and Doddridge, and Baxter and Bates, and Howe, were the legends of the Puritan hagiology. The old dissenters, he tells us, had Neale's "History of the Puritans" by heart, and made their children read Calamy's account of the 2000 ejected ministers along with the stories of Daniel in the Lions' Den and Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego. Sympathy for the persecuted, unbending resistance to the oppressor, was the creed which had passed into their blood. "This covenant they kept as the stars keep their courses; this principle they stuck by, for want of knowing better, as it sticks by them to the last. It grew with their growth, it does not wither

in their decay. . . It glimmers with the last feeble eyesight, smiles in the faded cheek like infancy, and lights a path before them to the grave. This"—for in Hazlitt lies a personal application in all his moralising —"This is better than the whirligig life of a court poet"—such, for example, as Robert Southey.

But Hazlitt's descent was not pure. If we could trace back the line of his ancestry we should expect to find that, by some freak of fortune, one of the rigid old Puritans had married a descendant of some great Flemish or Italian painter. Love of graceful forms and bright colouring and voluptuous sensations had been transmitted to their descendants, though hitherto repressed by the stern discipline of British nonconformity. As the discipline relaxed, the Hazlitts reverted to the ancestral type. Hazlitt himself, his brother and his sister, were painters by instinct. The brother became a painter of miniatures by profession; and Hazlitt to the end of his days revered Titian almost as much as he revered his great idol Napoleon. An odd pair of idols, one thinks, for a youth brought up upon Pripscovius and his brethren! A keen delight in all artistic and natural beauty were awkward endowments for a youth intended for the ministry. Keats was scarcely more out of place in a surgery than Hazlitt

would have been in a Unitarian pulpit of those days, and yet from that pulpit, oddly enough, came the greatest impulse to Hazlitt. It came from a man who, like Hazlitt himself, though in a higher degree than Hazlitt, combined the artistic and the philosophic temperament. Coleridge, as Hazlitt somewhere says, threw a great stone into the standing pool of contemporary thought; and it was in January 1798—one of the many dates in his personal history to which he recurs with unceasing fondness—that Hazlitt rose before daylight and walked ten miles in the mud to hear Coleridge preach. He has told, in his graphic manner, how the voice of the preacher "rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes;" how he launched into his subject, after giving out the text, "like an eagle dallying with the wind;" and how his young hearer seemed to be listening to the music of the spheres, to see the union of poetry and philosophy and behold truth and genius embracing under the eye of religion. His description of the youthful Coleridge has a fit pendant in the wonderful description of the full-blown philosopher in Mr Carlyle's "Life of Stirling;" where, indeed, one or two touches are taken from Hazlitt's Essays. It is Hazlitt who remarked, even at this early meeting, that the dreamy poet philosopher

could never decide on which side of the footpath he should walk; and Hazlitt, who struck out the epigram that Coleridge was an excellent talker if allowed to start from no premisses and come to no conclusion. The glamour of Coleridge's theosophy never seems to have fascinated Hazlitt's stubborn intellect. At this time, indeed, Coleridge had not yet been inoculated with German mysticism. In after years, the disciple, according to his custom, renounced his master and assailed him with half-regretful anger. But the intercourse and kindly encouragement of so eminent a man seems to have roused Hazlitt's ambition. His poetical and his speculative intellect were equally stirred. The youth was already longing to write a philosophical treatise. The two elements of his nature thus roused to action led him along a "strange diagonal." He would be at once a painter and a metaphysician. Some eight years of artistic labour convinced him that he could not be a Titian or a Raphael, and he declined to be a mere Hazlitt junior. His metaphysical studies, on the contrary, convinced him that he might be a Hume or a Berkeley; but unluckily they convinced himself alone. The tiny volume which contained their results was neglected by everybody but the author, who, to the end of his days, loved it with the love of a

mother for a deformed child. It is written, to say the truth, in a painful and obscure style; it is the work of a man who has brooded over his own thoughts in solitude till he cannot appreciate the need of a clear exposition. The narrowness of his reading had left him in ignorance of the new aspects under which the eternal problems were presenting themselves to the new generation; and a metaphysical discussion in antiquated phraseology is as useless as a lady's dress in the last year's fashion. Hazlitt, in spite of this double failure, does not seem to have been much disturbed by impecuniosity; but the most determined Bohemian has to live. For some years he strayed about the purlieus of literature, drudging, translating, and doing other cobbler's work. Two of his performances, however, were characteristic; he wrote an attack upon Malthus, and he made an imprudent marriage. Even Malthusians must admit that imprudent marriages may have some accidental good consequences. When a man has fairly got his back to the wall, he is forced to fight; and Hazlitt, at the age of thirty-four, with a wife and a son, at last discovered the great secret of the literary profession, that a clever man can write when he has to write or starve. To compose had been labour and grief to him, so long as he could

potter round a thought indefinitely; but with the printer's devil on one side and the demands of a family on the other, his ink began to flow freely, and during the last fifteen or seventeen years of his life he became a voluminous though fragmentary author. Several volumes of essays, lectures, and criticisms, besides his more ambitious "Life of Napoleon," and a great deal of anonymous writing, attest his industry. He died in 1830, at the age of fifty-two; leaving enough to show that he could have done more, and a good deal of rare, if not of the highest kind of excellence.

Hazlitt, as I have said, is everywhere autobiographical. Besides that secret, that a man can write if he must, he had discovered the further secret that the easiest of all topics is his own feelings. It is an apparent paradox, though the explanation is not far to seek, that Hazlitt, though shy with his friends, was the most unreserved of writers. Indeed he takes the public into his confidence with a facility which we cannot easily forgive. Biographers of late have been guilty of flagrant violations of the unwritten code which should protect the privacies of social life from the intrusions of public curiosity. But the most unscrupulous of biographers would hardly have dared to tear aside the veil so audaciously as Hazlitt, in one conspicuous instance at least, chose to

do for himself. His idol Rousseau had indeed gone further; but when Rousseau told the story of his youth, it was at least seen through a long perspective of years, and his own personality might seem to be scarcely interested. Hazlitt chose, in the strange book called the "New Pygmalion," or "Liber Amoris," to invite the British public at large to look on at a strange tragi-comedy, of which the last scene was scarcely finished. Hazlitt had long been unhappy in his family life. His wife appears to have been a masculine woman, with no talent for domesticity; completely indifferent to her husband's pursuits, and inclined to despise him for so fruitless an employment of his energies. They had already separated, it seems, when Hazlitt fell desperately in love with Miss Sarah Walker, the daughter of his lodging-housekeeper. The husband and wife agreed to obtain a divorce under the Scotch law, after which they might follow their own paths, and Sarah Walker become the second Mrs Hazlitt. Some months had to be spent by Mr and Mrs Hazlitt in Edinburgh, with a view to this arrangement. The lady's journal records her impressions; which, it would seem, strongly resembled those of a tradesman getting rid of a rather flighty and imprudent partner in business. She is extremely precise as to all pecuniary and legal details; she calls upon

her husband now and then, takes tea with him, makes an off-hand remark or two about some picture-gallery which he had been visiting, and tells him that he has made a fool of himself, with the calmness of a lady dismissing a troublesome servant, or a schoolmaster parting from an ill-behaved pupil. And meanwhile, in queer contrast, Hazlitt was pouring out to his friends, letters which seem to be throbbing with unrestrainable passion. He is raving as Romeo at Mantua might have raved about Juliet. To hear Miss Walker called his wife will be music to his ears, such as they never heard. But it seems doubtful whether, after all, his Juliet will have him. He shrieks mere despair and suicide. Nothing is left in the world to give him a drop of comfort. The breeze does not cool him nor the blue sky delight him. He will never lie down at night nor rise up of a morning in peace, nor even behold his little boy's face with pleasure unless he is restored to her favour. And Mrs Hazlitt reports, after acknowledging a receipt of £10, that Mr Hazlitt was so much "enamoured" of one of these letters that he pulled it out of his pocket twenty times a day, wanted to read it to his companions, and ranted and gesticulated till people took him for a madman. The "Liber Amoris" is made out of these letters—more or less altered and disguised,

with some reports of conversations with the lovely Sarah. "It was an explosion of frenzy," says De Quincey; his reckless mode of relieving his bosom of certain perilous stuff, with little care whether it produced scorn or sympathy. A passion which urges its victim to such improprieties should be, at least, deep and genuine. One would have liked him better if he had not taken his frenzy to market. The "Liber Amoris" tells us accordingly that the author, Hazlitt's imaginary double, died abroad, "of disappointment preying on a sickly frame and morbid state of mind." The hero, in short, breaks his heart when the lady marries somebody else. Hazlitt's heart was more elastic. Miss Sarah Walker married, and Hazlitt next year married a widow lady "of some property," made a tour with her on the Continent, and then—quarrelled with her also. It is not a pretty story. Hazlitt's biographer informs us, by way of excuse, that his grandfather was "physically incapable"—whatever that may mean—"of fixing his affection upon a single object." He "comprehended," indeed, "the worth of constancy" and other virtues as well as most men, and could have written about them better than most men; but somehow "a sinister influence or agency," a periphrasis for a sensuous temperament, was per-

petually present, which confined his virtues to the sphere of theory. An apology sometimes is worse than a satire. The case, however, seems to be sufficiently plain. We need not suspect that Hazlitt was consciously acting a part and nursing his "frenzy" because he thought that it would make a startling book. He was an egotist and a man of impulse. His impressions were for the time overpowering; but they were transient. His temper was often stronger than his passions. A gust of anger would make him quarrel with his oldest friends. Every emotion justified itself for the time, because it was his. He always did well, whether it pleased him for the moment to be angry, to be in love, to be cynical, or to be furiously indignant. The end, therefore, of his life exhibits a series of short impetuous fits of passionate endeavour, rather than devotion to a single overruling purpose; and all his writings are brief outbursts of eloquent feeling, where neither the separate fragments nor the works considered as a whole obey any law of logical development. And yet, in some ways, Hazlitt boasted, and boasted plausibly enough, of his constancy. He has the same ideas to the end of his life that he had at fourteen. He would, he remarks, be an excellent man on a jury; he would say little, but would starve the eleven other

obstinate fellows out. Amongst politicians he was a faithful Abdiel, when all others had deserted the cause. He loved the books of his boyhood, the fields where he had walked, the gardens where he had drunk tea, and, to a rather provoking extent, the old quotations and old stories which he had used from his first days of authorship. The explanation of the apparent paradox gives the clue to Hazlitt's singular character.

What I have called Hazlitt's egotism is more euphemistically and perhaps more accurately described by Talfourd,* "an intense consciousness of his own individual being." The word egotism in our rough estimates of character is too easily confounded with selfishness. Hazlitt might have been the person who, as one making a strange confession, assured a friend that he took a deep interest in his own concerns. He was, one would say, decidedly unselfish, if by selfishness is meant a disposition to feather one's own nest without regard for other people's wants. Still less was he selfish in the sense of preferring solid bread and butter to the higher needs of mind and spirit. His sentiments are always generous, and if scorn is too familiar a mood it is scorn of the base and servile. But his

* In the excellent Essay prefixed to "Hazlitt's Literary Remains."

peculiarity is that these generous feelings are always associated with some special case. He sees every abstract principle by the concrete instance. He hates insolence in the abstract, but his hatred flames into passion when it is insolence to Hazlitt. He resembles that good old lady who wrote on the margin of her "Complete Duty of Man" the name of that neighbour who most conspicuously sinned against the precept in the opposite text. Tyranny with Hazlitt is named Pitt, party spite is Gifford, apostasy is Southey, and fidelity may be called Cobbett or Godwin; though he finds names for the vices much more easily than for the virtues. And thus, if he cannot be condemned for selfishness, one must be charitable not to put down a good many of his offences to its sister jealousy. The personal and the public sentiments are so invariably blended in his mind that neither he nor anybody else could have analysed their composition. He was apt to be the more moody and irritable because his resentments clothed themselves spontaneously in the language of some nobler emotion. If his friends are cold, he bewails the fickleness of humanity; if they are successful, it is not envy that prompts his irritation, but the rarity of the correspondence between merit and reward. Such a man is more

faithful to his dead than to his living friends. The dead cannot change, they always come back to his memory in their old colours; their names recall the old tender emotion placed above all change and chance. But who can tell that our dearest living friend may not come into awkward collision with us before he has left the room? It is as well to be on our guard! It is curious how the two feelings alternate in Hazlitt's mind in regard to the friends who are at once dead and living; how fondly he dwells upon the Coleridge of Wem and Nether Stowey where he first listened to the enchanter's voice, and with what bitterness, which is yet but soured affection, he turns upon the Coleridge who defended war-taxes in the "Friend." He hacks and hews at Southey through several furious Essays, and ends with a groan. "We met him unexpectedly the other day in St Giles's," he says, "were sorry we had passed him without speaking to an old friend, turned and looked after him for some time as to a tale of other days—sighing, as we walked on, Alas, poor Southey!" He fancies himself to be in the mood of Brutus murdering Cæsar. It is patriotism struggling with old associations of friendship; if there is any personal element in the hostility, no one is less con-

scious of it than the possessor. To the whole Lake school his attitude is always the same—justice done grudgingly in spite of anger, or satire tempered by remorse. No one could say nastier things of that very different egotist, Wordsworth; nor could any one, outside the sacred clique, pay him heartier compliments. Nobody, indeed, can dislike egotism like an egotist. "Wordsworth," says Hazlitt, "sees nothing but himself and the universe; he hates all greatness and all pretensions to it but his own. His egotism is in this respect a madness, for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art: he hates chemistry, he hates conchology, he hates Sir Isaac Newton, he hates logic, he hates metaphysics," and so on through a long list of hatreds, ending with the inimitable Napoleon, whom Wordsworth hates, it seems, "to get rid of the idea of anything greater, or thought to be greater, than himself." Hazlitt might have made out a tolerable list of his own antipathies; though, to do him justice, of antipathies balanced by ardent enthusiasm, especially for the dead or the distant.

Hazlitt, indeed, was incapable of the superlative

self-esteem here attributed to Wordsworth. His egotism is a curious variety of that Protean passion, compounded as skilfully as the melancholy of Jacques. It is not the fascinating and humorous egotism of Lamb, who disarms us beforehand by a smile at his own crotchets. Hazlitt is too serious to be playful. Nor is it like the amusing egotism of Boswell, combined with a vanity which evades our contempt, because it asks so frankly for sympathy. Hazlitt is too proud and too bitter. Neither is it the misanthropic egotism of Byron, which, through all its affectation, implies a certain aristocratic contempt of the world and its laws. Hazlitt has not the sweep and continuity of Byron's passion. His egotism—be it said without offence—is dashed with something of the feeling common amongst his dissenting friends. He feels the awkwardness which prevails amongst a clique branded by a certain social stigma, and despises himself for his awkwardness. He resents neglect and scorns to ask for patronage. His egotism is a touchy and wayward feeling which takes the mask of misanthropy. He is always meditating upon his own qualities, but not in the spirit of the conceited man who plumes himself upon his virtues, nor of the ascetic who broods over his vices. He prefers the

apparently self-contradictory attitude (but human nature is illogical) of meditating with remorse upon his own virtues. What in others is complacency, becomes with him, ostensibly at least, self-reproach. He affects—but it is hard to say where the affectation begins—to be annoyed by the contemplation of his own merits. He is angry with the world for preferring commonplace to genius, and rewarding stupidity by success; but in form at least, he mocks at his own folly for expecting better things. If he is vain at bottom, his vanity shows itself indirectly by depreciating his neighbours. He is too proud to dwell upon his own virtues, but he has been convinced by impartial observation that the world at large is in a conspiracy against merit. Thus he manages to transform his self-consciousness into the semblance of proud humility, and extracts a bitter and rather morbid pleasure from dwelling upon his disappointments and failures. Half-a-dozen of his best Essays give expression to this mood, which is rather bitter than querulous. He enlarges cordially on the "disadvantages of intellectual superiority." An author—Hazlitt, to wit—is not allowed to relax into dulness; if he is brilliant he is not understood, and if he professes an interest in common things it is assumed that then

he must be a fool. And yet in the midst of these grumblings he is forced to admit a touch of weakness, and tells us how it pleases him to hear a man ask in the Fives Court, "Which is Mr Hazlitt?" He, the most idiosyncratic of men and most proud of it at bottom, declares how "he hates his style to be known, as he hates all idiosyncracy." At the next moment he purrs with complacency at the recollection of having been forced into an avowal of his authorship of an article in the "Edinburgh Review." Most generally he eschews these naïve lapses into vanity. He dilates on the old text of the "shyness of scholars." The learned are out of place in competition with the world. They are not and ought not to fancy themselves fitted for the vulgar arena. They can never enjoy their old privileges. "Fool that it (learning) was, ever to forego its privileges and loosen the strong hold it had on opinion in bigotry and superstition!" The same tone of disgust pronounces itself more cynically in an Essay "on the pleasure of hating." Hatred is, he admits, a poisonous ingredient in all our passions, but it is that which gives reality to them. Patriotism means hatred of the French, and virtue is a hatred of other people's faults to atone for

our own vices. All things turn to hatred. "We hate old friends, we hate old books, we hate old opinions, and at last we come to hate ourselves." Summing up all his disappointments, the broken friendships, and disappointed ambitions, and vanished illusions, he asks, in conclusion, whether he has not come to hate and despise himself? "Indeed, I do," he answers, "and chiefly for not having hated and despised the world enough."

This is an outbreak of temporary spleen. Nobody loved his old books and old opinions better. Hazlitt is speaking in the character of Timon, which indeed fits him rather too easily. But elsewhere the same strain of cynicism comes out in more natural and less extravagant form. Take, for example, the Essay on the "Conduct of Life." It is a piece of *bonâ fide* advice addressed to his boy at school, and gives in a sufficiently edifying form the commonplaces which elders are accustomed to address to their juniors. Honesty, independence, diligence, and temperance are commended in good set terms, though with an earnestness which, as is often the case with Hazlitt, imparts some reality to outworn formulæ. When, however, he comes to the question of marriage, the true man breaks out. Don't trust, he says, to

fine sentiments: they will make no more impression on these delicate creatures than on a piece of marble. Love in women is vanity, interest, or fancy. Women care nothing about talents or virtue—about poets or philosophers or politicians. They judge by the eye. "No true woman ever regarded anything but her lover's person and address." The author has no chance; for he lives in a dream, he feels nothing spontaneously, his metaphysical refinements are all thrown away. "Look up, laugh loud, talk big, keep the colour in your cheek and the fire in your eye, adorn your person, maintain your health, your beauty, and your animal spirits; for if you once lapse into poetry and philosophy you will want an eye to show you, a hand to guide you, a bosom to love—and will stagger into your grave old before your time, unloved and unlovely." "A spider," he adds, "the meanest creature that crawls or lives, has its mate or fellow, but a scholar has no mate or fellow." Mrs Hazlitt, Miss Sarah Walker, and several other ladies thought Hazlitt surly and cared nothing for his treatise on human nature. Therefore (it is true Hazlittian logic) no woman cares for sentiment. The sex which despised him must be despicable. Equally characteristic is his profound belief that his failure in

another line is owing to the malignity of the world at large. In one of his most characteristic Essays he asks whether genius is conscious of its powers. He writes what he declares to be a digression about his own experience, and we may believe as much as we please of his assertion that he does not quote himself as an example of genius. He has spoken, he declares, with freedom and power, and will not cease because he is abused for not being a Government tool. He wrote a charming character of Congreve's Millamant, but it was unnoticed because he was not a Government tool. Gifford would not relish his account of Dekkar's Orlando Friscobaldo—because he was not a Government tool. He wrote admirable table-talks—for once, as they are nearly finished, he will venture to praise himself. He could swear (were they not his) that the thoughts in them were "founded as the rock, free as the air, the hue like an Italian picture." But, had the style been like polished steel, as firm and as bright, it would have availed him nothing, for he was not a Government tool. The world hated him, we see, for his merits. It is a bad world, he says; but don't think that it is my vanity which has taken offence, for I am remarkable for modesty, and therefore I know that my virtues are faults of which I ought to be

ashamed. Is this pride or vanity, or humility or cynicism, or self-reproach for wasted talents, or an intimate blending of passions for which there is no precise name? Who can unravel the masks within masks of a cunning egotism?

To one virtue, however, that of political constancy, Hazlitt lays claim in the most emphatic terms. If he quarrels with all his friends—"most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies, or cold, uncomfortable acquaintance"—it is, of course, their fault. A thorough-going egotist must think himself the centre of gravity of the world, and all change of relations must mean that others have moved away from him. Politically, too, all who have given up his opinions are deserters, and generally from the worst of motives. He accuses Burke of turning against the revolution from—of all motives in the world!—jealousy of Rousseau; a theory still more impossible than Mr Buckle's hypothesis of madness. Court favour supplies in most cases a simpler explanation of the general demoralisation. Hazlitt could not give credit to men like Southey and Coleridge for sincere alarm at the French revolution. Such a sentiment would be too unreasonable, for he had not been alarmed himself. His constancy, indeed,

would be admirable if it did not suggest doubts of his wisdom. A man, whose opinions at fifty are his opinions at fourteen, has opinions of very little value. If his intellect had developed properly, or if he could have profited by experience, he will modify, though he need not retract his early views. To claim to have learnt nothing from 1792 to 1830 is almost to write yourself down as hopelessly impenetrable. The explanation is, that what Hazlitt called his opinions were really his feelings. He could argue very ingeniously, as appears from his remarks on Coleridge and Malthus, but his logic was the slave, not the ruler, of his emotions. His politics were simply the expression, in a generalised form, of his intense feeling of personality. They are a projection upon the modern political world of that heroic spirit of individual self-respect which animated his Puritan forefathers. One question, and only one question, he frequently tells us, is of real importance. All the rest is mere verbiage. The single dogma worth attacking or defending, is the divine right of kings. Are men, in the old phrase, born, saddled and bridled, and other men ready booted and spurred, or are they not? That is the single shibboleth which tells true men from false. Others, he says, bowed their heads to the image of the beast.

"I spit upon it, and buffeted it, and pointed at it, and drew aside the veil that then half concealed it." This passionate denial of the absolute right of men over their fellows is but vicarious pride, if you please to call it so, or a generous recognition of the dignity of human nature translated into political terms. Hazlitt's character did not change, however much his judgment of individuals might change; and therefore the principles which merely reflected his character remained rooted and unshaken. And yet his politics changed curiously enough in another sense. The abstract truth, in Hazlitt's mind, must always have a concrete symbol. He chose to regard Napoleon as the antithesis to the divine right of kings. That was the vital formula of Napoleon, his essence, and the true meaning of his policy. The one question in abstract politics was typified for Hazlitt by the contrast between Napoleon and the Holy Alliance. To prove that Napoleon could trample on human rights as roughly as any legitimate sovereign was for him mere waste of time. Napoleon's tyranny meant a fair war against the evil principle. Had Hazlitt lived in France, and come into collision with press laws, it is likely enough that his sentiments would have changed. But Napoleon was far enough off to serve as a mere poetical symbol;

his memory had got itself entwined in those youthful associations on which Hazlitt always dwelt so fondly; and, moreover, to defend "Boney" was to quarrel with most of his countrymen, and even of his own party. What more was wanted to make him one of Hazlitt's superstitions? No more ardent devotee of the Napoleonic legend ever existed, and Hazlitt's last years were employed in writing a book which is a political pamphlet as much as a history. He worships the eldest Napoleon with the fervour of a corporal of the Old Guard, and denounces the great conspiracy of kings and nobles with the energy of Cobbett; but he had none of the special knowledge which alone could give permanent value to such a performance. He seems to have consulted only the French authorities; and it is refreshing for once to find an Englishman telling the story of Waterloo entirely from the French side, and speaking, for example, of left and right as if he had been—as in imagination he was—by the side of Napoleon instead of Wellington. Even M. Victor Hugo can see more merit in the English army and its commander. A radical, who takes Napoleon for his polar star, must change some of his theories, though he disguises the change from himself;

but a change of a different kind came over Hazlitt as he grew older.

The enthusiasm of the Southeys and Wordsworths for the French revolution changed—whatever their motives—into enthusiasm for the established order. Hazlitt's enthusiasm remained, but became the enthusiasm of regret instead of hope. As one by one the former zealots dropped off he despised them as renegades, and clasped his old creed the more firmly to his bosom. But the change did not draw him nearer to the few who remained faithful. They perversely loved the wrong side of the right cause, or loved it for the wrong reason. He liked the Whigs no better than the Tories; the "Edinburgh" and the "Quarterly" were opposition coaches, making a great dust and spattering each other with mud, but travelling by the same road to the same end. A Whig, he said, was a trimmer, who dared neither to be a rogue nor an honest man, but was "a sort of whiffling, shuffling, cunning, silly, contemptible, unmeaning negation of the two." And the true, genuine, radical reformers? To them, as represented by the school of Bentham, Hazlitt entertained an aversion quite as hearty as his aversion for Whigs and Tories. If, he says, the Whigs are too

finical to join heartily with the popular advocates, the Reformers are too cold. They hated literature, poetry, and romance; nothing gives them pleasure that does not give others pain; utilitarianism means prosaic, hard-hearted narrow-minded dogmatism. Indeed, his pet essay on the principles of human nature was simply an assault on what he took to be their fundamental position. He fancied that the school of Bentham regarded man as a purely selfish and calculating animal; and his whole philosophy was an attempt to prove the natural disinterestedness of man, and to indicate for the imagination and the emotions their proper place beside the calculating faculty. Few were those who did not come under one or other clause of this sweeping denunciation. He assailed Shelley, who was neither Whig, Tory, nor Utilitarian, so cuttingly as to provoke a dispute with Leigh Hunt, and had some of his sharp criticisms for his friend Godwin. His general moral, indeed, is the old congenial one. The reformer is as unfit for this world as the scholar. He is the only wise man, but, as things go, wisdom is the worst of follies. The reformer, he says, is necessarily a marplot; he does not know what he would be at; if he did, he does not much care for it; and, moreover, he is "governed habitually by a spirit of contradiction, and

is always wise beyond what is practicable." Upon this text Hazlitt dilates with immense spirit, satirising the crotchety and impracticable race, and contrasting them with the disciplined phalanx of Toryism, brilliantly and bitterly enough to delight Giffard; and yet he is writing a preface to a volume of radical Essays. He is consoling himself for being in a minority of one by proving that two virtuous men must always disagree. Hazlitt is no genuine democrat. He hates "both mobs," or, in other words, the great mass of the human race. He would sympathise with Coriolanus more easily than with the Tribunes. He laughs at the perfectibility of the species, and holds that "all things move, not in progress, but in a ceaseless round." The glorious dream is fled:

> "The radiance which was once so bright
> Is now for ever taken from our sight;"

and his only consolation is to live over in memory the sanguine times of his youth, before Napoleon had fallen and the Holy Alliance restored the divine right of kings; to cherish eternal regret for the hopes that have departed, and hatred and scorn equally enduring for those who blasted them. "Give me back," he exclaims, "one single evening at Boxhill, after a stroll in the deep empurpled woods, before Bonaparte was

yet beaten, with 'wine of Attic taste,' when wit, beauty, friendship presided at the board." The personal blends with the political regret.

Hazlitt, the politician, was soured. He fed his morbid egotism by indignantly chewing the cud of disappointment, and scornfully rejecting comfort. He quarrelled with his wife and with most of his friends, even with the gentle Lamb, till Lamb regained his affections by the brief quarrel with Southey. Certainly, he might call himself, with some plausibility, "the king of good haters." But, after all, Hazlitt's cynicism is the souring of a generous nature; and when we turn from the politician to the critic and the essayist, our admiration for his powers is less frequently jarred by annoyance at their wayward misuse. His egotism—for he is still an egotist—here takes a different shape. His criticism is not of the kind which is now most popular. He lived before the days of philosophers who talk about the organism and its environment, and of the connoisseurs who boast of an eclectic taste for all the delicate essences of art. He never thought of showing that a great writer was only the product of his time, race, and climate; and he had not learnt to use such terms of art as "supreme," "gracious," "tender," "bitter," and "subtle," in which

a good deal of criticism now consists. Lamb, says Hazlitt, tried old authors "on his palate as epicures taste olives;" and the delicacy of discrimination which makes the process enjoyable is perhaps the highest qualification of a good critic. Hazlitt's point of view was rather different, nor can we ascribe to him without qualification that exquisite appreciation of purely literary charm which is so rare and so often affected. Nobody, indeed, loved some authors more heartily or understood them better; his love is so hearty that he cannot preserve the true critical attitude. Instead of trying them on his palate, he swallows them greedily. His judgment of an author seems to depend upon two circumstances. He is determined in great measure by his private associations, and in part by his sympathy for the character of the writer. His interest in this last sense is, one may say, rather psychological than purely critical. He thinks of an author not as the exponent of a particular vein of thought or emotion, nor as an artistic performer on the instrument of language, but as a human being to be loved or hated, or both, like Napoleon or Giffard or Southey.

Hazlitt's favourite authors were, for the most part, the friends of his youth. He had pored over their

pages till he knew them by heart; their phrases were as familiar to his lips as texts of Scripture to preachers who know but one book; the places where he had read them became sacred to him, and a glory of his early enthusiasm was still reflected from the old pages. Rousseau was his beloved above all writers. They had a natural affinity. What Hazlitt says of Rousseau may be partly applied to himself. Of Hazlitt it might be said almost as truly as of Rousseau, that "he had the most intense consciousness of his own existence. No object that had once made an impression upon him was ever after effaced." In Rousseau's "Confessions" and "Nouvelle Heloïse," Hazlitt saw the reflections of his own passions. He spent, he declares, two whole years in reading these two books; and they were the happiest years of his life. He marks with a white stone the days on which he read particular passages. It was on April 10, 1798—as he tells us some twenty years later—that he sat down to a volume of the "New Heloïse," at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. He tells us which passage he read and what was the view before his bodily eyes. His first reading of "Paul and Virginia" is associated with an inn at Bridgewater; and at another old-fashioned inn he tells how the rustic fare and

the quaint architecture gave additional piquancy to Congreve's wit. He remembers, too, the spot at which he first read Mrs Inchbald's "Simple Story;" how he walked out to escape from one of the tenderest parts, in order to return again with double relish. "An old crazy hand-organ," he adds, "was playing Robin Adair, a summer shower dropped manna on my head, and slaked my feverish thirst of happiness." He looks back to his first familiarity with his favourites as an old man may think of his honeymoon. The memories of his own feelings, of his author's poetry, and of the surrounding scenery, are inextricably fused together. The sight of an old volume, he says, sometimes shakes twenty years off his life; he sees his old friends alive again, the place where he read the book, the day when he got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky. To these old favourites he remained faithful, except that he seems to have tired of the glitter of Junius. Burke's politics gave him some severe twinges. He says, in one place, that he always tests the sense and candour of a liberal by his willingness to admit the greatness of Burke. He adds, as a note to the Essay in which this occurs, that it was written in a "fit of extravagant candour," when he thought that he could be more than just to an enemy without betraying a cause. He

oscillates between these views as his humour changes. He is absurdly unjust to Burke the politician ; but he does not waver in his just recognition of the marvellous power of the greatest—I should almost say the only great—political writer in the language. The first time he read a passage from Burke, he said, This is true eloquence. Johnson immediately became shelved, and Junius "shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-tuned sentences. But Burke's style was forked and playful like the lightning, crested like the serpent." He is never weary of Burke, as he elsewhere says; and, in fact, he is man enough to recognise genuine power when he meets it. To another great master he yields with a reluctance which is an involuntary compliment. The one author whom he admitted into his Pantheon after his youthful enthusiasm had cooled was unluckily the most consistent of Tories. Who is there, he asks, that admires the author of "Waverley" more than I do? Who is there that despises Sir Walter Scott more? The Scotch novels, as they were then called, fairly overpowered him. The imaginative force, the geniality and the wealth of picturesque incident of the greatest of novelists, disarmed his antipathy. It is curious to see how he struggles with himself. He blesses and

curses in a breath. He applies to Scott, Pope's description of Bacon, "the greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind," and asks—

> "Who would not laugh if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep if 'Waverley' were he?"

He crowns a torrent of abuse by declaring that Scott has encouraged the lowest panders of a venal press, "deluging and nauseating the public mind with the offal and garbage of Billingsgate abuse and vulgar slang;" and presently he calls Scott—by way, it is true, of lowering Byron—"one of the greatest teachers of morality that ever lived." He invents a theory, to which he returns more than once, to justify the contrast. Scott, he says, is much such a writer as the Duke of Wellington (the hated antithesis of Napoleon, whose "foolish face" he specially detests) is a general. The one gets 100,000 men together, and, "leaves it to them to fight out the battle, for if he meddled with it he might spoil sport; the other gets an innumerable quantity of facts together, and lets them tell their story as they may. The facts are stubborn in the last instance as the men are in the first, and in neither case is the broth spoiled by the cook." Both heroes show modesty and self-knowledge,

but "little boldness or inventiveness of genius." On the strength of this doctrine he even compares Scott disadvantageously with Godwin and Mrs Inchbald, who had, it seems, more invention though fewer facts. Hazlitt was not bound to understand strategy, and devoutly held that Wellington's armies succeeded because their general only looked on. But he should have understood his own trade a little better. Putting aside this grotesque theory, he feels Scott's greatness truly, and admits it generously. He enjoys the broth, to use his own phrase, though he is determined to believe that it somehow made itself.

Lamb said that Hazlitt was a greater authority when he praised than when he abused, a doctrine which may be true of others than Hazlitt. The true distinction is rather that Hazlitt, though always unsafe as a judge, is admirable as an advocate in his own cause, and poor when merely speaking from his brief. Of Mrs Inchbald I must say what Hazlitt shocked his audience by saying of Hannah More; that she has written a good deal which I have not read, and I therefore cannot deny that her novels might have been written by Venus; but I cannot admit that Wycherley's brutal Plain-dealer is as good as ten volumes of sermons. "It is curious to see," says

Hazlitt, rather naively, "how the same subject is treated by two such different authors as Shakspeare and Wycherley." Macaulay's remark about the same coincidence is more to the point. "Wycherley borrows Viola," says that vigorous moralist, "and Viola forthwith becomes a pander of the basest sort." That is literally true. Indeed, Hazlitt's love for the dramatists of the Restoration is something of a puzzle, except so far as it is explained by early associations. Even then it is hard to explain the sympathy which Hazlitt, the lover of Rousseau and sentiment, feels for Congreve, whose speciality it is that a touch of sentiment is as rare in his painfully-witty dialogues, as a drop of water in the desert. Perhaps a contempt for the prejudices of respectable people gave zest to Hazlitt's enjoyment of a literature, representative of a social atmosphere, most propitious to his best feelings. And yet, though I cannot take Hazlitt's judgment, I would frankly admit that Hazlitt's enthusiasm brings out Congreve's real merits with a force of which a calmer judge would be incapable. His warm praises of "The Beggar's Opera," his assault upon Sydney's "Arcadia," his sarcasms against that most detestable of poetasters, Tom Moore, are all excellent in their way, whether we do or do not agree with his final result. Whenever

Hazlitt writes from his own mind, in short, he writes what is well worth reading. Hazlitt learnt something in his later years from Lamb. He prefers, he says, those papers of Elia in which there was the least infusion of antiquated language; and, in fact, Lamb never inoculated him with his taste for the old English literature. Hazlitt gave a series of lectures upon the Elizabethan dramatists, and carelessly remarks some time afterwards that he has only read about a quarter of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, and intends to read the rest when he has a chance. It is plain, indeed, that the lectures, though written at times with great spirit, are the work of a man who has got them up for the occasion. And in his more ambitious and successful essays upon Shakspeare the same want of reading appears in another way. He is more familiar with Shakspeare's text than many better scholars. His familiarity is proved by a habit of quotation of which it has been disputed whether it is a merit or a defect. What phrenologists would call the adhesiveness of Hazlitt's mind, its extreme retentiveness for any impression which has once been received, tempts him to a constant repetition of familiar phrases and illustrations. He has, too, a trick of working in patches of his old essays, which

he expressly defends on the ground that a book which has not reached a second edition may be considered by its author as manuscript. This self-plagiarism sometimes worries us, as we are worried by a man whose conversation runs in ruts. But his quotations from other authors, where used in moderation, often give a pleasant richness to his style. Shakspeare, in particular, seems to be a storehouse into which he can always dip for an appropriate turn of phrase, and his love of Shakspeare is of a characteristic kind. He has not counted syllables nor weighed various readings. He does not throw a new light upon delicate indications of thought and sentiment, nor philosophise after the manner of Coleridge and the Germans, nor regard Shakspeare as the representative of his age according to the sweeping method of M. Taine. Neither does he seem to love Shakspeare himself as he loves Rousseau or Richardson. He speaks contemptuously of the Sonnets and Poems, and, though I respect his sincerity, I think that such a verdict necessarily indicates indifference to the most Shakspearian parts of Shakspeare. The calm assertion that the qualities of the Poems are the reverse of the qualities of the plays is unworthy of Hazlitt's general acuteness. That which really attracts Hazlitt is sufficiently indicated by the

title of his book; he describes the characters of Shakspeare's plays. It is Iago, and Timon, and Coriolanus, and Anthony, and Cleopatra, who really interest him. He loves and hates them as if they were his own contemporaries; he gives the main outlines of their character with a spirited touch. And yet one somehow feels that Hazlitt is not at his best in Shakspearian criticism; his eulogies savour of commonplace, and are wanting in spontaneity. There is not that warm glow of personal feeling which gives light and warmth to his style whenever he touches upon his early favourites. Perhaps he is a little daunted by the greatness of his task, and, perhaps, there is something, in the Shakspearian width of sympathy and in the Shakspearian humour, which lies beyond Hazlitt's sphere. His criticism of Hamlet is feeble; he does not do justice to Mercutio or to Jaques; but he sympathises more heartily with the tremendous passion of Lear and Othello, and finds something congenial to his taste in Coriolanus and Timon of Athens. It is characteristic, too, that he evidently understands Shakspeare better on the stage than in the closet. When he can associate Iago and Shylock with the visible presence of Kean, he can

introduce that personal element which is so necessary to his best writing.

The best, indeed, of Hazlitt's criticisms—if the word may be so far extended—are his criticisms of living men. The criticism of contemporary portraits called the "Spirit of the Age" is one of the first of those series which have now become popular, as it is certainly one of the very best. The descriptions of Bentham, and Godwin, and Coleridge, and Horne Tooke, are masterpieces in their way. They are, of course, unfair; but that is part of their charm. One would no more take for granted Hazlitt's valuation of Wordsworth than Timon's judgment of Alcibiades. Hazlitt sees through coloured glasses, but his vision is not the less penetrating. The vulgar satirist is such a one as Hazlitt somewhere mentioned who called Wordsworth a dunce. Hazlitt was quite incapable of such a solecism. He knew, nobody better, that a telling caricature must be a good likeness. If he darkens the shades, and here and there exaggerates an ungainly feature, we still know that the shade exists and that the feature is not symmetrical. De Quincey reports the saying of some admiring friend of Hazlitt, who confessed to a shudder whenever

Hazlitt used his habitual gesture of placing his hand within his waistcoat. The hand might emerge armed with a dagger. Whenever, said the same friend, (Heaven preserve us from our friends!) Hazlitt had been distracted for a moment from the general conversation, he looked round with a mingled air of suspicion and defiance, as though some objectionable phrase might have evaded his censure in the interval. The traits recur to us when we read Hazlitt's descriptions of the men he had known. We seem to see the dark sardonic man, watching the faces and gestures of his friends, ready to take sudden offence at any affront to his cherished prejudices, and yet hampered by a kind of nervous timidity which makes him unpleasantly conscious of his own awkwardness. He remains silent, till somebody unwittingly contradicts his unspoken thoughts—the most irritating kind of contradiction to some people!—and perhaps heaps indiscriminating praise on an old friend, a term nearly synonymous with an old enemy. Then the dagger suddenly flashes out, and Hazlitt strikes two or three rapid blows, aimed with unerring accuracy at the weak points of the armour which he knows so well. And then, as he strikes, a relenting comes over him; he remembers old days with a sudden gush of fondness,

and puts in a touch of scorn for his allies or himself. Coleridge may deserve a blow, but the applause of Coleridge's enemies awakes his self-reproach. His invective turns into panegyric, and he warms for a time into hearty admiration, which proves that his irritation arises from an excess, not from a defect, of sensibility; but finding that he has gone a little too far, he lets his praise slide into equivocal description, and with some parting epigram, he relapses into silence. The portraits thus drawn are never wanting in piquancy nor in fidelity. Brooding over his injuries and his desertions, Hazlitt has pondered almost with the eagerness of a lover upon the qualities of his intimates. Suspicion, unjust it may be, has given keenness to his investigation. He has interpreted in his own fashion every mood and gesture. He has watched his friends as a courtier watches a royal favourite. He has stored in his memory, as we fancy, the good retorts which his shyness or unreadiness smothered at the propitious moment, and brings them out in the shape of a personal description. When such a man sits at our tables, silent and apparently self-absorbed, and yet shrewd and sensitive, we may well be afraid of the dagger, though it may not be drawn till after our death, and may write memoirs

instead of piercing flesh. And yet Hazlitt is no mean assassin of reputations; nor is his enmity as a rule more than the seamy side of friendship. Giffard, indeed, and Croker, "the talking potato," are treated as outside the pale of human rights.

Excellent as Hazlitt can be as a dispenser of praise and blame, he seems to me to be at his best in a different capacity. The first of his performances which attracted much attention was the Round Table, designed by Leigh Hunt (who contributed a few papers), on the old Spectator model. In the essays afterwards collected in the volumes called "Table Talk" and the "Plain Speaker," he is still better, because more certain of his position. It would, indeed, be difficult to name any writer from the days of Addison to those of Lamb, who has equalled Hazlitt's best performances of this kind. Addison is too unlike to justify a comparison; and, to say the truth, though he has rather more in common with Lamb, the contrast is much more obvious than the resemblance. Each wants the other's most characteristic vein; Hazlitt has hardly a touch of humour, and Lamb is incapable of Hazlitt's caustic scorn for the world and himself. They have indeed in common, besides certain superficial tastes, a love of pathetic brooding over the past. But the

sentiment exerted is radically different. Lamb forgets himself when brooding over an old author or summing up the "old familiar faces." His melancholy and his mirth cast delightful cross-lights upon the topics of which he converses, and we do not know, until we pause to reflect, that it is not the intrinsic merit of the objects, but Lamb's own character, which has caused our pleasure. They would be dull, that is, in other hands; but the feeling is embodied in the object described, and not made itself the source of our interest. With Hazlitt, it is the opposite. He is never more present than when he is dwelling upon the past. Even in criticising a book or a man, his favourite mode is to tell us how he came to love or to hate him; and in the non-critical essays he is always appealing to us, directly or indirectly, for sympathy with his own personal emotions. He tells us how passionately he is yearning for the days of his youth; he is trying to escape from his pressing annoyances; wrapping himself in sacred associations against the fret and worry of surrounding cares; repaying himself for the scorn of women or Quarterly Reviewers by retreating into some imaginary hermitage; and it is the delight of dreaming upon which he dwells more than upon the beauty of the visions revealed to his inward eye. The

force with which this sentiment is presented gives a curious fascination to some of his essays. Take, for example, the essay in "Table Talk," "On living to One's self,"—an essay written, as he is careful to tell us, on a mild January day in the country, whilst the fire is blazing on the hearth and a partridge getting ready for his supper. There he expatiates in happy isolation on the enjoyments of living as "a silent spectator of the mighty scheme of things;" as being in the world, and not of it; watching the clouds and the stars, poring over a book, or gazing at a picture without a thought of becoming an author or an artist. He has drifted into a quiet little backwater, and congratulates himself in all sincerity on his escape from the turbulent stream outside. He drinks in the delight of rest at every pore; reduces himself for the time to the state of a polyp drifting on the warm ocean stream; and becomes a voluptuous hermit. He calls up the old days when he acted up to his principles, and found pleasure enough in endless meditation and quiet observation of nature. He preaches most edifyingly on the disappointments, the excitements, the rough impacts of hard facts upon sensitive natures, which haunt the world outside, and declares, in all sincerity, "This sort of dreaming existence is the best;

he who quits it to go in search of realities generally barters repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets." He is sincere, and therefore eloquent; and we need not, unless we please, add the remark that he enjoys rest because it is a relief from toil; and that he will curse the country as heartily as any man if doomed to entire rest. This meditation on the phenomena of his own sensations leads him often into interesting reflections of a psychological kind. He analyses his own feelings with constant eagerness, as he analyses the character of his enemies. A good specimen is the essay "On Antiquity," in the "Plain Speaker," which begins with some striking remarks on the apparently arbitrary mode in which some objects and periods seem older to us than others, in defiance of chronology. The monuments of the Middle Ages seem more antique than the Greek statues and temples with their immortal youth. "It is not the full-grown, articulated, thoroughly accomplished periods of the world that we regard with the pity or reverence due to age, so much as those imperfect, unformed, uncertain periods which seem to totter on the verge of non-existence, to shrink from the grasp of our feeble imagination, as they crawl out of, or retire into the womb of time, of which our utmost assurance is to doubt whether they ever were

or not." And then, as usual, he passes to his own experience, and meditates on the changed aspect of the world in youth and maturer life. The petty, personal emotions pass away, whilst the grand and ideal "remains with us unimpaired in its lofty abstraction from age to age." Therefore, though the inference is not quite clear, he can never forget the first time he saw Mrs Siddons act, or the appearance of Burke's Letter to a Noble Lord. And then, in a passage worthy of Sir Thomas Browne, he describes the change produced as our minds are stereotyped, as our most striking thoughts become truisms, and we lose the faculty of admiration. In our youth "art woos us; science tempts us with her intricate labyrinths; each step presents unlooked-for vistas, and closes upon us our backward path. Our onward road is strange, obscure, and infinite. We are bewildered in a shadow, lost in a dream. Our perceptions have the brightness and indistinctness of a trance. Our continuity of consciousness is broken, crumbles, and falls to pieces. We go on learning and forgetting every hour. Our feelings are chaotic, confused, strange to each other and ourselves." But in time we learn by rote the lessons which we had to spell out in our youth. "A very short period (from 15 to 25 or 30) includes the

whole map and table of contents of human life. From that time we may be said to live our lives over again, repeat ourselves—the same thoughts return at stated intervals, like the tunes of a barrel-organ; and the volume of the universe is no more than a form of words, a book of reference."

From such musings Hazlitt can turn to describe any fresh impression which has interested him, in spite of his occasional weariness, with a freshness and vivacity which proves that his eye had not grown dim, nor his temperament incapable of enjoyment. He fell in love with Miss Sarah Wilson at the tolerably ripe age of 43; and his desire to live in the past is not to be taken more seriously than his contempt for his literary reputation. It lasts only till some vivid sensation occurs in the present. In congenial company he could take a lively share in conversation, as is proved not only by external evidence but by his very amusing book of conversations with Northcote—an old cynic out of whom it does not seem that anybody else could strike many sparks,—or from the essay, partly historical, it is to be supposed, in which he records his celebrated discussion with Lamb, on persons whom one would wish to have seen. But perhaps some of his most characteristic performances

in this line are those in which he anticipates the modern taste for muscularity. His wayward disposition to depreciate ostensibly his own department of action, leads him to write upon the "disadvantages of intellectual superiority," and to maintain the thesis that the glory of the Indian jugglers is more desirable than that of a statesman. And perhaps the same sentiment, mingled with sheer artistic love of the physically beautiful, prompts his eloquence upon the game of Fives—in which he praises the great player Cavanagh as warmly, and describes his last moments as pathetically, as if he were talking of Rousseau—and still more his immortal essay on the fight between the Gasman and Bill Neate. Prize-fighting is fortunately fallen into hopeless decay, and we are pretty well ashamed of the last flicker of enthusiasm created by Sayers and Heenan. We may therefore enjoy without remorse the prose-poem in which Hazlitt kindles with genuine enthusiasm to describe the fearful glories of the great battle. Even to one who hates the most brutalising of amusements, the spirit of the writer is impressibly contagious. We condemn, but we applaud; we are half disposed for the moment to talk the old twaddle about British pluck; and when Hazlitt's companion on his way home pulls out of his

pocket a volume of the "Nouvelle Heloïse," admit for a moment that "love of the Fancy is," as the historian assures us, "compatible with a cultivation of sentiment." If Hazlitt had thrown as much into his description of the Battle of Waterloo, and had taken the English side, he would have been a popular writer. But even Hazlitt cannot quite embalm the memories of Cribb, Belcher, and Gully.

It is time, however, to stop. More might be said by a qualified writer of Hazlitt's merits as a judge of pictures or of the stage. The same literary qualities mark all his writings. De Quincey, of course, condemns Hazlitt, as he does Lamb, for a want of "continuity." "No man can be eloquent," he says, "whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated, capricious, and non-sequacious." But then De Quincey will hardly allow that any man is eloquent except Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, and Thomas De Quincey. Hazlitt certainly does not belong to their school; nor, on the other hand, has he the plain homespun force of Swift and Cobbett. And yet readers who do not insist upon measuring all prose by the same standard, will probably agree that if Hazlitt is not a great rhetorician, if he aims at no gorgeous effects of complex harmony, he has yet an eloquence of his own. It is indeed an eloquence

which does not imply quick sympathy with many moods of feeling, or an intellectual vision at once penetrating and comprehensive. It is the eloquence characteristic of a proud and sensitive nature, which expresses a very keen if narrow range of feeling, and implies a powerful grasp of one, if only one side of the truth. Hazlitt harps a good deal upon one string; but that string vibrates forcibly. His best passages are generally an accumulation of short, pithy sentences, shaped in strong feeling, and coloured by picturesque association; but repeating, rather than corroborating, each other. The last blow goes home, but each falls on the same place. He varies the phrase more than the thought; and sometimes he becomes obscure, because he is so absorbed in his own feelings that he forgets the very existence of strangers who require explanation. Read through Hazlitt, and this monotony becomes a little tiresome; but dip into him at intervals, and you will often be astonished that so vigorous a writer has not left some more enduring monument of his remarkable powers.

VIII.

MR DISRAELI'S NOVELS.

It is a commonplace with men of literary eminence to extol the man of deeds above the man of words. Scott was half ashamed of scribbling novels whilst Wellington was winning battles; and, if Mr Carlyle be a true prophet, the most brilliant writer is scarcely worthy to unloose the shoe's latchet of the silent heroes of action. Perhaps it is graceful in masters of the art to depreciate their own peculiar function. People who have less personal interest in the matter need not be so modest. I will confess, at any rate, to preferring the men who have sown some new seed of thought, above the heroes whose names mark epochs in history. I would rather make the nation's ballads than give its laws, dictate principles than carry them into execution, and leaven a country with new ideas than translate them into facts, inevitably mangling and distorting them in the process. And therefore I would rather have written Hamlet than

defeated the Spanish Armada; or "Paradise Lost," than have turned out the Long Parliament; or "Gray's Elegy," than have stormed the heights of Abram; or the Waverley Novels, than have won Waterloo or even Trafalgar. I would rather have been Voltaire or Goethe than Frederick or Napoleon; and I suspect that when the poor historian of the nineteenth century begins his superhuman work, he will, as a thorough philosopher, attribute more importance to two or three recent English writers than to all the English statesmen who have been strutting and fretting their little hour at Westminster. And therefore, too, I wish that Mr Disraeli could have stuck to his novels instead of rising to be Prime Minister of England. This opinion is, of course, entirely independent of any judgment which may be passed upon Mr Disraeli's political career. Granting that his cause has always been the right one, granting that he has rendered it essential services, I should still wish that his brilliant literary ability had been allowed to ripen undisturbed by all the worries and distractions of parliamentary existence. Persons who think the creation of a majority in the House of Commons a worthy reward for the labours of a lifetime will, of course, differ from this conclusion. Mr Disraeli, at any rate, ought to agree. No satirist

has ever struck off happier portraits of the ordinary British legislator, or been more alive to the stupifying influences of a parliamentary career. We have gone through a peaceful revolution since Mr Disraeli first sketched Rigby and Taper and Tadpole from the life; but the influences which they embodied are still as powerful, and a parliamentary atmosphere as little propitious to the pure intellect, as ever. Coningsby, if he still survives, must have lost many illusions; he must have herded with the Tapers and Tadpoles, and prompted Rigby to write slashing articles on his behalf in the quarterlies. He must have felt that his intellect was cruelly wasted in talking claptrap and platitude to suit the thick comprehensions of his party; and the huge dead weight of the invincible impenetrability to ideas of ordinary mankind must have lain heavy upon his soul. How many Tadpoles, one would like to know, still haunt the Carlton Club, or throng the ministerial benches, and how many Rigbys have forced their way into the Cabinet? That is one of the state secrets which will hardly be divulged by the only competent observer. But at any rate it is sad that the critic, who applied the lash so skilfully, should have been so unequally yoked with the objects of his contempt. Mr Disraeli's talents for entertaining fiction

may not indeed have been altogether wasted in his official career; but he at least may pardon admirers of his writing, who regret that he should have squandered powers of imagination, capable of true creative work, upon that alternation of truckling and blustering which is called governing the country.

The qualities which are of rather equivocal value in a minister of state may be admirable in the domain of literature. It is hardly desirable that the followers of a political leader should be haunted by an ever-recurring doubt, as to whether his philosophical utterances express deep convictions, or the extemporised combinations of a fertile fancy, and be uncertain whether he is really putting their clumsy thoughts into clearer phrases, or foisting showy nonsense upon them for his own purposes, or simply laughing at them in his sleeve. But, in a purely literary sense, this ambiguous hovering between two meanings, this oscillation between the ironical and the serious, is always amusing, and sometimes delightful. Some simple-minded people are revolted, even in literature, by the ironical method; and tell the humorist, with an air of moral disapproval, that they never know whether he is in jest or in earnest. To such matter-of-fact persons Mr Disraeli's novels must be a standing

offence; for it is his most characteristic peculiarity that the passage from one phase to the other is imperceptible. He has moments of obvious seriousness; at frequent intervals, comes a flash of downright sarcasm, as unmistakable in its meaning as the cut of a whip across your face; and elsewhere we have passages which aim unmistakably, and sometimes with unmistakable success, at rhetorical excellence. But, between the two, there is a wide field where we may interpret his meaning as we please. The philosophical theory may imply a genuine belief, or may be a mere bit of conventional filling in, or perhaps a parody of his friends or himself. The gorgeous passages may be intentionally over-coloured, or may really represent his most sincere taste. His homage may be genuine or a biting mockery. His extravagances are kept precisely at such a pitch that it is equally fair to argue that a satirist must have meant them to be absurd, or to argue only that he would have seen their absurdity in anybody else. The unfortunate critic feels himself in a position analogous to that of the suitors in the "Merchant of Venice." He may blunder grievously, whatever alternative he selects. If he pronounces a passage to be pure gold, it may turn out to be merely

the mask of a bitter sneer; or he may declare it to be ingenious burlesque when put forward in the most serious earnest; or may ridicule it as overstrained bombast, and find that it was never meant to be anything else. It is wiser to admit that perhaps the author was not very clear himself, or possibly enjoyed that ambiguous attitude which might be interpreted according to the taste of his readers and the development of events. A man who deals in oracular utterances acquires instinctively a mode of speech which may shift its colour with every change of light. The texture of Mr Disraeli's writings is so ingeniously shot with irony and serious sentiment that each tint may predominate by turns. It is impossible to suppose that the weaver of so cunning a web should never have intended the effects which he produces; but frequently, too, they must be the spontaneous and partly unconscious results of a peculiar intellectual temperament. Delight in blending the pathetic with the ludicrous is the characteristic of the true humorist. Mr Disraeli is not exactly a humorist, but something for which the rough nomenclature of critics has not yet provided a distinctive name. His pathos is not sufficiently tender, nor his laughter quite genial enough. The

quality which results is homologous to, though not identical with, genuine humour: for the smile we must substitute a sneer, and the element which enters into combination with the satire is something more distantly allied to poetical unction than to glittering rhetoric. The Disraelian irony thus compounded is hitherto a unique product of intellectual chemistry.

Most of Mr Disraeli's novels are intended to set forth what, for want of a better name, must be called a religious or political creed. To grasp its precise meaning, or to determine the precise amount of earnestness with which it is set forth, is of course hopeless. Its essence is to be mysterious, and half the preacher's delight is in tantalising his disciples. At moments he cannot quite suppress the amusement with which he mocks their hopeless bewilderment. When Coningsby is on the point of entering public life, he reads a speech of one of the initiated, "denouncing the Venetian constitution, to the amazement of several thousand persons, apparently not a little terrified by this unknown danger, now first introduced to their notice." What more amusing than suddenly to reveal to good easy citizens that what they took for wholesome food is

deadly poison, and to watch their hopeless incapacity to understand whether you are really announcing a truth or launching an epigram?

Mr Disraeli, undoubtedly, has certain fixed beliefs which underlie and which, indeed, explain the superficial versatility of his teaching. Amongst the various doctrines with which he plays more or less seriously, two at least are deeply rooted in his mind. He holds with a fervour in every way honourable, a belief in the marvellous endowments of his race, and connected with this belief is an almost romantic admiration for every manifestation of intellectual power. Vivian Grey, in a bit of characteristic bombast, describes himself as "one who has worshipped the empire of the intellect;" and his career is simply an attempt to act out the principle that the world belongs of right to the cleverest. Of Sidonia, after every superlative in the language has been lavished upon his marvellous acquirements, we are told that "the only human quality that interested him was intellect." Intellect is equally, if not quite as exclusively, interesting to the creator of Sidonia. He admires it in all its forms—in a Jesuit or a leader of the International, in a charlatan or a statesman, or perhaps even more in one who combines the two characters; but

the most interesting of all objects to Mr Disraeli, if one may judge from his books, is a precocious youth, whose delight in the sudden consciousness of great abilities has not yet been dashed by experience. In some other writers we may learn the age of the author by the age of his hero. A novelist who adopts the common practice of painting from himself naturally finds out the merits of middle age in his later works. But in every one of Mr Disraeli's works, from Vivian Grey to Lothair, the central figure is a youth, who is frequently a statesman at school, and astonishes the world before he has reached his majority. The change in the author's position is, indeed, equally marked in a different way. The youthful heroes of Mr Disraeli's early novels are creative; in his later they become chiefly receptive. Vivian Grey and Contarini Fleming show their genius by insubordination; Coningsby and Tancred learn wisdom by sitting at the feet of Sidonia; and Lothair reduces himself so completely to a mere "passive bucket", to be pumped into by every variety of teacher, that he is unpleasantly like a fool. Mr Disraeli still loves ingenuous youth; but he has gained quite a new perception of the value of docility. Here and there, of course, there is a gentle gibe at juvenile vanity. "My opinions are already formed on every

subject," says Lothair; "that is, on every subject of importance; and, what is more, they will never change." But such vanity has nothing offensive. The audacity with which a lad of twenty solves all the problems of the universe, excites in Mr Disraeli genuine and really generous sympathy. Sidonia converts the sentiment into a theory. Experience, he says, is less than nothing to a creative mind. "Almost everything that is great has been done by youth." The greatest captains, the greatest poets, artists, statesmen, and religious reformers of the world, have done their best work by middle life. All theories upon all subjects can be proved from history; and the great Sidonia is not to be pinned down by too literal an interpretation. But at least he is expressing Mr Disraeli's admiration for intellect which has the fervour, rapidity, and reckless audacity of youth, which trusts its intuitions instead of its calculations, and takes its crudest guesses for flashes of inspiration. The exuberant buoyancy of his youthful heroes gives a certain contagious charm to Mr Disraeli's pages, which is attractive even when verging upon extravagance. Our popular novelists have learned to associate high spirits with muscularity; their youthful heroes are either athletes destined to put on flesh in later days, or

premature prigs with serious convictions and a tendency to sermons and blue-books. After a course of such books, Mr Disraeli's genuine love of talent is refreshing. He dwells fondly upon the effervescence of genius which drives men to kick over the traces of respectability and strike out short cuts to fame. If at bottom his heroes are rather eccentric than original, they have at least a righteous hatred for all bores and Philistines, and despise orthodoxy, political economy, and sound information generally. They can provide you with new theories of politics and history, as easily as Mercutio could pour out a string of similes; and we have scarcely the heart to ask whether this vivacious ebullition implies the process of fermentation by which a powerful mind clears its crude ideas, or only an imitation of the process by which superlative cleverness apes true genius. Intellect, as it becomes sobered by middle age and by scholastic training, is no longer so charming. When its guesses ossify into fixed opinions, and its arrogance takes the airs of scientific dogmatism, it is always a tiresome and may be a dangerous quality. Some indication of what Mr Disraeli means by intellect may be found in the preface to Lothair. Speaking of the conflict between science and the old religions, he says that

it is a most flagrant fallacy to suppose that modern ages have a monopoly of scientific discovery. The greatest discoveries are not those of modern ages. "No one for a moment can pretend that printing is so great a discovery as writing, or algebra, or language. What are the most brilliant of our chemical discoveries compared with the invention of fire and the metals?" Hipparchus ranks with the Keplers and Newtons; and Copernicus was but the champion of Pythagoras. To say nothing of the characteristic assumption that somebody "discovered" language and fire in the same sense as modern chemists discovered spectrum analysis, the argument is substantially that, because Hipparchus was as great a genius as Newton, the views of the ancients upon religious or historical questions deserve just as much respect as those of the moderns. In other words, the accumulated knowledge of ages has taught us nothing. "What is conveniently called progress" is merely a polite name for change; and one clever man's guess is as good as another, whatever the period at which he lived. This theory is the correlative of Sidonia's assertion, that experience is useless to the man of genius. The experience of the race is just as valueless. Modern criticism is nothing but an intellectual revolt of the Teutonic races against the

Semitic revelation, as the French revolution was a political revolt of the Celtic races. The disturbance will pass away; and we shall find that Abraham and Moses knew more about the universe than Hegel or Comte. The prophets of the sacred race were divinely endowed with an esoteric knowledge concealed from the vulgar behind mystic symbols and ceremonies. If the old oracles are dumb, some gleams of the same power still remain, and in the language of mere mortals are called genius. We find it in perfection only amongst the Semites, whose finer organisation, indicated by their musical supremacy, enables them to catch the still, small voice inaudible to our grosser ears. The Aryans, indeed, have some touches of a cognate power, but it is dulled by a more sensuous temperament. They can enter the court of the Gentiles; but their mortal vesture is too muddy for admission into the holy of holies. If ever they catch a glimpse of the truth, it is in their brilliant youth, when, still uncorrupted by worldly politics, they can induce some Sidonia partly to draw aside the veil.

The intellect, then, as Mr Disraeli conceives it, is not the faculty denounced by theologians, which delights in systematic logical inquiry, and hopes to attain truth by the unrestricted conflict of innumerable

minds. It is an abnormal power of piercing mysteries granted only to a few distinguished seers. It does not lead to an earthly science, expressible in definite formulas, and capable of being taught in Sunday schools. The knowledge cannot be fully communicated to the profane, and is at most to be shadowed forth in dim oracular utterances. Mr Disraeli's instinctive affinity for some kind of mystic teaching is indicated by Vivian Grey's first request to his father. "I wish," he exclaims, "to make myself master of the latter Platonists. I want Plotinus and Porphyry, and Iamblichus, and Syrianus, and Mosanius Tyrius, and Pericles, and Hierocles, and Sallustius, and Damasenis!" But Vivian Grey, as we know, wanted also to conquer the Marquis of Carabas; and the odd combination between a mystic philosopher and a mere political charlatan displays Mr Disraeli's peculiar irony. Intellect with him is a double-edged weapon: it is at once the faculty which reads the dark riddle of the universe, and the faculty which makes use of Tapers and Tadpoles. Our modern Daniel is also a shrewd electioneering agent. Cynics, indeed, have learned in these later days to regard mystery as too often synonymous with nonsense. The difficulty of interpreting esoteric doctrines to the

vulgar generally consists in this—that the doctrines are mere collections of big words which collapse, instead of becoming lucid, when put into plain English. The mystagogue is but too closely allied to the charlatan. He may be straining to utter some secret too deep for human utterance, or he is looking wise to conceal absolute vacuity of thought. And at other times he must surely be laughing at the youthful audacity which fancies that speculation is to be carried on by a series of sudden inspirations, instead of laborious accumulation of rigorously-tested reasonings.

The three novels, "Coningsby," "Sybil," and "Tancred," published from 1844 to 1847, form, as their author has told us, a trilogy intended to set forth his views of political, social, and religious problems. Each of them exhibits, in one form or other, this peculiar train of thought. "Coningsby," if I am not mistaken, is by far the ablest, and probably owes its pre-eminence to the simple fact that it deals with the topics in which its author felt the keenest interest. The social speculations of "Sybil" savour too much of the politician getting up a telling case; and the religious speculations of "Tancred" are pushed to the extreme verge of the grotesque. But "Coningsby" wants little but a greater absence of purpose to be a

first-rate novel. If Mr Disraeli had confined himself to the merely artistic point of view, he might have drawn a picture of political society worthy of comparison with Vanity Fair. Lord Monmouth is evidently related to the Marquis of Steyne; and Rigby is a masterpiece, though perhaps rather too suggestive of a direct study from nature. Lord Monmouth is the ideal type of the "Venetian" aristocracy; and Rigby, like his historical namesake, of the corrupt wire-pullers who flourished under their shade. The consistent Epicureanism of the noble, in whom a sense of duty is only represented by a vague instinct that he ought to preserve his political influence as part of his personal splendour, and as an insurance against possible incendiarism, is admirably contrasted by the coarser selfishness of Rigby, who relieves his patron of all dirty work on consideration of feathering his own nest, and fancying himself to be a statesman. The whole background, in short, is painted with inimitable spirit and fidelity. The one decided failure amongst the subsidiary characters is Lucian Grey, the professional parasite, who earns his dinners by his witty buffoonery. Somehow, his fun is terribly dreary on paper; perhaps because, as a parasite, he is not allowed to indulge in the cutting irony which animates

all Mr Disraeli's best sayings. The simple buffoonery of exuberant animal spirits is not in Mr Disraeli's line. When he can neither be bitter nor rhetorical, he is apt to drop into mere mechanical flatness. But nobody has described more vigorously all the meaner forms of selfishness, stupidity, and sycophancy engendered under "that fatal drollery," as Tancred describes it, "called a parliamentary government." The pompous dulness which affects philosophical gravity, the appetite for the mere dry husks and bran of musty constitutional platitude which takes the airs of political wisdom, the pettifogging cunning which supposes the gossip of lobbies and smoking-rooms to be the embodiment of statesmanship, the selfishness which degrades political warfare into a branch of stock-jobbing, and takes a great principle to be useful in suggesting electioneering cries, as Telford thought that navigable rivers were created to feed canals,—these and other tendencies favoured by party government are hit off to the life. "The man they call Dizzy" can despise a "miserable creature having the honour to be" as heartily as Mr Carlyle himself, and, if his theories are serious, sometimes took our blessed Constitution to be a mere shelter for such vermin as the Tapers and Tadpoles.

Two centuries of a parliamentary monarchy and a parliamentary Church, says Coningsby, have made government detested, and religion disbelieved. Political compromises," says the omniscient Sidonia, "are not to be tolerated except at periods of rude transition. An educated nation recoils from the imperfect vicariat of what is called representative government. Your House of Commons, that has absorbed all other powers in the State, will in all probability fall more rapidly than it rose." In short, the press will take its place. This is one of those impromptu theories of history which are not to be taken too literally. Indeed, the satirical background is intended to throw into clearer relief a band of men of genius to whom has been granted some insight into the great political mystery. Who, then, are the true antithesis to the Tapers and Tadpoles? Should we compare them with a Cromwell, who has a creed as well as a political platform; and contrast "our young Queen and our old institutions" with some new version of the old war-cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon?" Or may we at least have a glimpse of a Chatham, wakening the national spirit to sweep aside the Newcastles and Bubb Dodingtons of the present day? Or, if Crom-

wells and Chathams be too old-fashioned, and translate the Semitic principle into a narrow English Protestantism, may we not have some genuine revolutionary fanatic, a Cimourdain or a Gauvain, to burn up all this dry chaff of mouldy politics with the fire of a genuine human passion? Such a contrast, however effective, would have been a little awkward in the year 1844. Young England had an ideal standard of its own, and Mr Disraeli must be the high-priest of its peculiar hero-worship. Whether, in this case, political trammels injured his artistic sense, or whether his peculiar artistic tendencies injured his political career, is a question rather for the historian than the critic.

Certain it is, at any rate, that the *cénacle* of politicians, whose interests are to be thrown in relief against this mass of grovelling corruption, are but a feeble contrast, even in the purely artistic sense. We have no right to doubt that Mr Disraeli thought that Coningsby and his friends represented the true solution of the difficulty; yet if anybody had wished to demonstrate that a genuine belief might sometimes make a man more contemptible than hypocritical selfishness, he could scarcely have defended the paradox more ingeniously. "Unconscious cerebration"

has become a popular explanation of many phenomena; and it would hardly be fanciful to assume that one lobe of Mr Disraeli's brain is in the habit of secreting bitter satire unknown to himself, and cunningly inserting it behind the thin veil of sentiment unconsciously elaborated by the other. We are prepared, indeed, to accept the new doctrine, as cleverly as Balzac could have inoculated us with a provisional belief in animal magnetism, to heighten our interest in a thrilling story of wonder. We have judicious hints of an esoteric political doctrine, which has been partially understood by great men at various periods of our history. The whole theory is carefully worked out in the opening pages of Sybil. The most remarkable thing about our popular history, so Mr Disraeli tells us, is, that it is "a complete mystification;" many of the principal characters never appear, as, for example, Major Wildman, who was "the soul of English politics from 1640 to 1688." It is not surprising, therefore, that two of our three chief statesmen in later times should be systematically depreciated. The younger Pitt, indeed, has been extolled, though on wrong grounds. But Bolingbroke and Shelburne, our two finest political geniuses, are passed over with contempt by ordinary historians. A

historian might amuse himself by tracing the curious analogy between the most showy representatives of the old race of statesmen and the modern successor who delights to sing his praises. The Patriot King is really to some extent an anticipation of Mr Disraeli's peculiar democratic Toryism. But the chief merit of Shelburne would seem to be that the qualities which earned for him the nickname of Malagrida made him convenient as a hypothetical depository of some esoteric scheme of politics. For the purposes of fiction, at any rate, we may believe that English politics are a riddle of which only three men have guessed the true solution since the "financial" revolution of 1688. Pitt was only sound so far as he was the pupil of Shelburne; but Bolingbroke, Shelburne, and Mr Disraeli possessed the true key, and fully understood, for example, that Charles I. was the "holocaust of direct taxation." But frankly to expound this theory would be to destroy its charm, and to cast pearls before political economists. And, therefore, its existence is dimly adumbrated rather than its meaning revealed; and we have hints that there are wheels within wheels, and that in the lowest deep of mystery there is a yet deeper mystery. Coningsby and his associates,

the brilliant Buckhurst and the rich Catholic country gentleman, Eustace Lyle, are but unripe neophytes, feeling after the true doctrine, but not yet fully initiated. The superlative Sidonia, the man who by thirty has exhausted all the sources of human knowledge, become master of the learning of every nation, of all tongues, dead or living, and of every literature, western and oriental; who has pursued all the speculations of science to their last term; who has lived in all orders of society, and observed man in every phase of civilisation; who has a penetrative intellect which enables him to follow as by intuition the most profound of all questions, and a power of communicating with precision the most abstruse ideas; whose wealth would make Monte Christo seem a pauper; who is so far above his race that woman seems to him a toy, and man a machine,—this thrice-miraculous Sidonia, who can yet stoop from his elevation to win a steeple-chase from the Gentiles, or return their hospitality by an exquisite dinner, is the fitting depository of the precious secret. No one can ever accuse Mr Disraeli of a want of audacity. He does not, like weaker men, shrink from introducing men of genius because he is afraid that he will not be able to make

them talk in character; and when, in Venetia, he introduces Byron and Shelley, he is kind enough to write poetry for them, which produces as great an effect as the original.

And now having a true prophet, having surrounded him with a band of disciples, so that the transmitted rays of wisdom may be bearable to our mortal eyes, we expect some result worthy of this startling machinery. Let the closed casket open, and the magic light stream forth to dazzle the gazing world. We know, alas! too well that our expectation cannot be satisfied. There is not any secret doctrine in politics. Bolingbroke may have been a very clever man, but he could not see through a stone wall. The whole hypothesis is too extravagant to admit of any downright prosaic interpretation. But something might surely be done for the imagination, if not for the reason. Some mystic formula might be pronounced which might pass sufficiently well for an oracle so long as we are in the charmed world of fiction. Let Sidonia only repeat some magniloquent gnome from Greek, or Hebrew, or German philosophers, give us a scrap of Hegel or of the Talmud, and we will willingly take it to be the real thing for imaginative purposes, as we allow ourselves to believe that some theatrical goblet

really contains a fluid of magical efficacy. Unluckily, however, and the misfortune illustrates the inconvenience of combining politics with fiction, Mr Disraeli had something to say, and still more unluckily that something was a mere nothing. It was the creed of Young England; and even greater imaginative power might have failed in the effort to instil the most temporary vitality into that flimsy collection of sham beliefs. A mere sentimentalist might possibly have introduced it in such a way as to impress us at least with his own sincerity. But how is such doctrine to be uttered by lips which are, at the same time, pouring out the shrewdest of sarcasms against politicians who, if more pachydermatous, were at least more manly? In a new-fangled church, amidst incense and genuflexions and ecclesiastical millinery, one may listen patiently to a ritualist sermon; but no mortal skill could make ritualism sound plausible in regions to which the outer air of common sense is fairly admitted. The only mode of escape is by slurring over the doctrine, or by proclaiming it with an air of burlesque. Mr Disraeli keeps most dexterously in the region of the ambiguous. He does at last produce his political wares with a certain *aplomb;* but a doubtful smile about his lips encourages some of the spectators to fancy that he

estimates their value pretty accurately. His last book of Coningsby opens with a Christmas scene worthy of an illustrated keepsake. We have buttery-hatches, and beef, and ale, and red cloaks, and a lord of misrule, and a hobby-horse, and a boar's head with a canticle.

> "Caput apri defero,
> Reddens laudes domino,"

sing the noble ladies, and we are left to wonder whether Mr Disraeli blushed or sneered as he wrote. Certainly we find it hard to recognise the minister who proposes to put down ritualism by an Act of Parliament. He does his very best to be serious, and anticipates critics by a passing blow at the utilitarians; but we have a shrewd suspicion that the blow is mere swagger, to keep up his courage, or perhaps a covert hint that though he can at times fool his friends, he is not a man to be trifled with by his enemies. What, we must ask, would Sidonia say to this dreariest of all shams? When Coningsby meets Sidonia in the forest, and expresses a wish to see Athens, the mysterious stranger replies, "The age of ruins is past; have you seen Manchester?" It would, indeed, be absurd to infer that Mr Disraeli does not see the weak side of Manchester. After dilating, in Tancred, upon

the vitality of Damascus, he observes, "As yet the disciples of progress have not been able exactly to reach this instance; but it is said that they have great faith in the future of Birkenhead." Perhaps the true sentiment is that the Semitic races, the unchangeable depositaries of eternal principles, look with equal indifference upon the mushroom growths of Aryan civilisation, whether an Athens or a Birkenhead be the product, but admit that the living has so far an advantage over the dead. To find the moral of Coningsby may be impracticable, and is at any rate irrelevant. The way to enjoy it is to look at the world through the eyes of Sidonia. The world—at least the Gentile world—is a farce. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred are fools. Some are prosy and reasoning fools, and make excellent butts for stinging sarcasms; others are flighty and imaginative fools, and can best be ridiculed by burlesquing their folly. As for the hundredth man—the youthful Coningsby or Tancred—his enthusiasm is refreshing, and his talent undeniable; let us watch his game, applaud his talents, and always remember that great talent is almost as necessary for consummate folly as for consummate success. Adopting such maxims, we can enjoy Coningsby throughout; for we need not care whether we

are laughing at the author or with him. We may heartily enjoy his admirable flashes of wit, and, when he takes a serious tone, may oscillate agreeably between the beliefs that he is in solemn earnest, or in his bitterest humour; only we must not quite forget that the farce has a touch in it of tragedy, and that there is a real mystery somewhere. Satire, pure and simple, becomes wearisome. If a latent sense of humour is necessary to prevent a serious man from becoming a bore, it is still more true that some serious creed, however misty and indefinite, is required to raise the mere mocker into a genuine satirist. That is the use of Sidonia. He is ostensibly but a subordinate figure, and yet, if we struck him out, the whole composition would be thrown out of harmony. Looking through his eyes, we can laugh, but we laugh with that sense of dignity which arises out of the consciousness of a secret wisdom, shadowy and indefinite in the highest degree, perilously apt to sound like nonsense if cramped by a definite utterance, but yet casting over the whole picture a kind of magical colouring, which may be mere trickery or may be a genuine illumination, but which, whilst we are not too exacting, brings out pleasant and perplexing effects. The lights and shadows fluctuate, and solid forms melt provokingly into mist; but we

must learn to enjoy the uncertain twilight which prevails on the border-land between romance and reality, if we would enjoy the ambiguities and the ironies and the mysteries of Coningsby.

The other two parts of the trilogy show the same qualities, but in different proportions. Sibyl is chiefly devoted to what its author calls "an accurate and never-exaggerated picture of a remarkable period in our social history." We need not inquire into the accuracy. It is enough to say that in this particular department Mr Disraeli shows himself capable of rivalling in force and vivacity the best of those novelists who have tried to turn blue-books upon the condition of the people into sparkling fiction. If he is distinctly below the few novelists of truer purpose who have put into an artistic shape a profound and first-hand impression of those social conditions which statisticians try to tabulate in blue-books,—if he does not know Yorkshiremen in the sense in which Miss Brontë knew them, and still less in the sense in which Scott knew the borderers—he can write a disguised pamphlet upon the effects of trades' unions in Sheffield with a brilliancy which might excite the envy of Mr Charles Reade. But in Tancred we again come upon the true vein of mystery in which is Mr Disraeli's special idiosyncrasy; and the

effect is still more bewildering than in Coningsby. Giving our hands to our singular guide, we are to be led into the most secret place, and be initiated into the very heart of the mystery. Tancred is Coningsby once more, but Coningsby no longer satisfied with the profound political teaching of Bolingbroke, and eager to know the very last word of that riddle which, once solved, all theological and social and political difficulties will become plain. He is exalted to the pitch of enthusiasm at which even supernatural machinery may be introduced without a sense of discord. And yet, intentionally or from the inevitable conditions of the scheme, the satire deepens with the mystery; and the more solemn become the words and gestures of our high priest, the more marked becomes his ambiguous air of irony. Good, innocent Tancred fancies that his doubts may be solved by an English bishop; and Mr Disraeli revels in the ludicrous picture of a young man of genius taking a bishop seriously. Yet it must be admitted that Tancred's own theory sounds to the vulgar Saxon even more nonsensical than the episcopal doctrine. His notion is that "inspiration is not only a divine but a local quality," and that God can only speak to man upon the soil of Palestine—a theory which has afterwards to be amended by the

hypothesis that, even in Palestine, God can only speak to a man of Semitic race. Lest we should fancy that this belief contains an element of irony, it is approved by the great Sidonia; but even Sidonia is not worthy of the deep mysteries before us. He intimates to Tancred that there is one from whose lips even he himself has derived the sacred knowledge. The Spanish priest, Alonzo Lara, Jewish by race, but, as a Catholic prelate, imbued with all the later learning—a member of that Church which was founded by a Hebrew, and still retains some of the "magnetic influence"—this great man, in whom all the influences thus centre, is the only worthy hierophant. And thus, after a few irresistible blows at London society, we find ourselves fairly on the road to Palestine, and listen for the great revelation. We scorn the remark of the simple Lord Milford, that there is "absolutely no sport of any kind" near Jerusalem; and follow Tancred where his ancestors have gone before him. We bend in reverence before the empty tomb of the divine prince of the house of David, and fall into ecstasies in the garden of Bethany. Solace comes, but no inspiration. Though the marvellous Lara is briefly introduced, and though a beautiful young woman comes straight out of the "Arabian Nights," and asks the insoluble question, What would have become

of the Atonement, if the Jews had not persuaded the Romans to crucify Jesus? we are still tantalised by the promised revelation, which melts before us like a mirage. Once, indeed, on the sacred mountain of Sinai, a vision greets the weary pilgrim, in which a guardian angel talks in the best style of Sidonia or Mr Disraeli. But we are constantly distracted by our guide's irresistible propensity for a little political satire. A Syrian Vivian Grey is introduced to us, whose intrigues are as audacious and as futile as those of his English parallel, but whose office seems to be the purely satirical one of interpreting Tancred's lofty dreams into political intrigues suited to a shrewd but ignorant Oriental. Once we are convinced that the promise is to be fulfilled. Tancred reaches the strange tribe of the Ansarey, shrouded in a more than Chinese seclusion. Can they be the guardians of the "Asian mystery?" To our amazement it turns out that they are of the faith of Mr Phœbus in Lothair. They have preserved the old gods of paganism; and their hopes, which surely cannot be those of Mr Disraeli, are that the world will again fall prostrate before Apollo (who has a striking likeness to Tancred) or Astarte. What does it all mean? or does it all mean anything? The most solemn revelation has been given by that myste-

rious figure which appeared in Sinai, in "the semblance of one who, though not young, was still untouched by time; a countenance like an Oriental night, dark yet lustrous, mystical yet clear. Thought, rather than melancholy, spoke from the pensive passion of his eyes; while on his lofty forehead glittered a star that threw a solemn radiance on the repose of his majestic forehead." After explaining that he was the Angel of Arabia, this personage told Tancred to "announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of Theocratic Equality." But when Tancred, after his startling adventures, got back to Jerusalem, he found his anxious parents, the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont, accompanied by the triumvirate of bear-leaders which their solicitude had appointed to look after him—Colonel Brace, the Rev. Mr Bernard, and Dr Roby. And thus the novel ends like the address of Miss Hominy. "Out laughs the stern philosopher," or, shall we say, the incarnation of commonplace, "What, ho! arrest me that wandering agency; and so, the vision fadeth." Theocratic equality has not yet taken its place as an electioneering cry.

Has our guide been merely blowing bubbles for our infantile amusement? Surely he has been too solemn. We could have sworn that some of the passages were written, if not with tears in his eyes,

at least with a genuine sensibility to the solemn and romantic elements of life. Or was he carried away for a time into real mysticism for which he seeks to apologise by adopting the tone of the man of the world? Surely his satire is too keen, even when it causes the collapse of his own fancies. Even Coningsby and Lord Marney, the heroes of the former novels, appear in "Tancred" as shrewd politicians, and obviously Tancred will accept the family seat when he gets back to his paternal mansion. We can only solve the problem, if we are prosaic enough to insist upon a solution, by accepting the theory of a double consciousness, and resolving to pray with the mystic, and sneer with the politician, as the fit takes us. It is an equal proof of intellectual dulness to be dead to either aspect of things. Let us agree that a brief sojourn in the world of fancy or in the world of blue-books is a qualification for a keener enjoyment of the other, and not brutally attempt to sever them by fixed lines. Each is best seen in the light reflected from the other, and we had best admit without asking awkward questions; but they are blended after a perfectly original fashion in the strange phantasmagoria of "Tancred." Let the images of crusaders and modern sportsmen, Hebrew

doctors and classical artists, mediæval monks and Anglican bishops, perform their strange antics before us, and the scenery shift from Manchester to Damascus, or Pall Mall to Bethany, in obedience to laws dictated by the fancy instead of the reason; let each of the motley actors be alternately the sham and the reality, and our moods shift as arbitrarily from grave to gay, from high-strung enthusiasm to mocking cynicism, and we shall witness a performance which is always amusing and original, and sometimes even poetical, and of which only the harshest realist will venture to whisper that, after all, it is a mere mystification.

But it is time to leave stories in which the critic, however anxious to observe the purely literary aspect, is constantly tempted to diverge into the political or theological theories suggested. The "trilogy" was composed after Mr Disraeli had become a force in politics, and the didactic tendency is constantly obtruding itself. In the period between Vivian Grey (1826-7) and Coningsby (1844) he had published several novels in which the prophet is lost, or nearly lost, in the artist. Of the Wondrous Tale of Alroy it is enough to say that it is a very spirited attempt to execute an impossible task. All historical novels—with one or two doubtful exceptions—are a

weariness to the flesh, and when the history is so remote from any association with modern feeling, even Mr Disraeli's vivacity is not able to convert shadows into substances. An opposite error disturbs one's appreciation of Venetia. Byron and Shelley were altogether too near to the writer to be made into heroes of fiction. The portraits are pale beside the originals; and though Lord Cadurcis and Marmion Herbert may have been happier men than their prototypes, they are certainly not so interesting. Henrietta Temple and Contarini Fleming may count as Mr Disraeli's most satisfactory performances. He has worked without any secondary political purpose, and has, therefore, produced more harmonious results. The aim is ambitious, but consistent. Contarini Fleming is the record of the development of a poetic nature—a theme, as we are told, "virgin in the imaginative literature of every country." The praises of Goethe, of Beckford, and of Heine gave a legitimate satisfaction to its author. Henrietta Temple professes to be a love-story pure and simple. Love and poetry are certainly themes worthy of the highest art; and if Mr Disraeli's art be not the highest, it is more effective when freed from the old alloy. The same intellectual temperament is indeed perceptible,

though in this different field it does not produce quite the same results. One prominent tendency connects all his stories. When Lothair made its appearance, critics were puzzled, not only by the old problem as to the seriousness of the writer, but by the extraordinary love of glitter. Were the palaces and priceless jewels and vast landed estates distributed with such reckless profusion amongst the characters, intended as a covert satire upon the vulgar English worship of wealth, or did they imply a genuine instinct for the sumptuous? Mr Disraeli would apparently parody the old epitaph, and write upon the monument of every ducal millionaire, "Of such are the kingdom of heaven." Vast landed estates and the Christian virtues, according to him, naturally go together; and he never dismisses a hero without giving him such a letter of credit as Sidonia bestowed upon Tancred. "If the youth who bears this requires advances, let him have as much gold as would make the right-hand lion, on the first step of the throne of Solomon the king; and if he wants more, let him have as much as would form the lion that is on the left; and so on through every stair of the royal seat." The theory that so keen a satirist of human follies must have been more or less ironical in his professed

admiration for boundless wealth, though no doubt tempting, is probably erroneous. The simplest explanation is most likely to be the truest. Mr Disraeli has a real, unfeigned delight in simple splendour, in "ropes of pearls," in priceless diamonds, gorgeous clothing, and magnificent furniture. The phenomenon is curious, but not uncommon. One may sometimes find an epicure who still retains an infantile taste for sweetmeats, and is not afraid to avow it. Experience of the world has taught Mr Disraeli the hollowness of some objects of his early admiration, but it has not so dulled his palate as to make pure splendour insipid to his taste. It is as easy to call this love of glitter vulgar, as to call his admiration for dukes snobbish; but the passion is too sincere to deserve any harsh name. Why should not a man have a taste for the society of dukes, or take a child's pleasure in bright colours for their own sake? There is nothing intrinsically virtuous in preferring a dinner of herbs to the best French cookery. So long as the taste is thoroughly genuine, and is not gratified at the cost of unworthy concessions, it ought not to be offensive.

Mr Disraeli's pictures may be, or rather they certainly are, too gaudy in their colouring, but his

lavish splendour is evidently prompted by a frank artistic impulse, and certainly implies no grovelling before the ordinary British duke. It is this love of splendour, it may be said parenthetically, combined with his admiration for the non-scientific type of intellect, which makes the Roman Catholic Church so strangely fascinating for Mr Disraeli. His most virtuous heroes and heroines are members of old and enormously rich Catholic families. His poet, Contarini Fleming, falls prostrate before the splendid shrines of a Catholic chapel, all his senses intoxicated by solemn music and sweet incense and perfect pictures. Lothair, wanting a Sidonia, only escaped by a kind of miracle from the attractions of Rome. The sensibility to such influences has a singular effect upon his modes of representing passion. He has frankly explained his theory. The peasant-noble of Wordsworth had learnt to know love "in huts where poor men lie," and a long catena of poetical authorities might be adduced in support of the principle. That is not Mr Disraeli's view. "Love," he says, "that can illumine the dark hovel and the dismal garret, that sheds a ray of enchanting light over the close and busy city, seems to mount with a lighter and more glittering pinion in an atmosphere as bright

as its own plumes. Fortunate the youth, the romance of whose existence is placed in a scene befitting its fair and marvellous career; fortunate the passion that is breathed in palaces, amid the ennobling creations of surrounding art, and quits the object of its fond solicitude amidst perfumed gardens and in the shade of green and silent woods"—woods, that is, which ornament the stately parks of the aforesaid palaces. All Mr Disraeli's passionate lovers—and they are very passionate—are provided with fitting scenery. The exquisite Sybil is allowed, by way of exception, to present herself for a moment in the graceful character of a sister of charity relieving a poor family in their garret; but we can detect at once the stamp of noble blood in every gesture, and a coronet is ready to descend upon her celestial brow. Everywhere else we make love in gilded palaces, to born princesses in gorgeous apparel; terraced gardens, with springing fountains and antique statues, are in the background; or at least an ancestral castle, with long galleries filled with the armour borne by our ancestors to the Holy Land, rises in cheery state, waiting to be restored on a scale of unprecedented magnificence by the dower of our affianced brides. And, of course, the passion is suitable to such accessories. "There

is no love but at first sight,"* says Mr Disraeli; and, indeed, love at first sight is alone natural to such beings, on whom beauty and talent have been poured

* "He never loved that loved not at first sight," says Marlowe, and Shakspeare after him. I cannot say whether this be an undesigned literary coincidence or an appropriation. Mr Disraeli, we know, is skilful in the art of annexation. One or two instances may be added. Here is a clear case of borrowing. Fuller says in the character of the good sea-captain in the "Holy State"—"Who first taught the water to imitate the creatures on land, so that the sea is the stable of horse-fishes, the stye of hog-fishes, the kennel of dog-fishes, and in all things, the sea is the ape of the land?" Esper George in "Vivian Grey," says to the sea; "O thou indifferent ape of earth, what art thou, O bully ocean, but the stable of horse-fishes, the stall of cow-fishes, the stye of hog-fishes, and the kennel of dog-fishes?" Other cases may be more doubtful. Some time ago, Mr Disraeli spoke of the policy of his opponents as a combination of "blundering and plundering." The jingle was thought to be adapted from a previous epigram about "meddling and muddling;" but here is the identical phrase: Coleridge wrote in the "Courier;" "The writer, whilst abroad, was once present when most bitter complaints were made of the ——government. "Government!" exclaimed a testy old captain of a Mediterranean trading-vessel, "call it *blunderment* or *plunderment*, or what you like—only not a *government!*"—Coleridge's "Essays on his own Times," p. 893. Mr Disraeli is sometimes credited with the epigram in "Lothair" about critics being authors who have failed. I know not who said this first; but it was certainly not Mr Disraeli. I find, for example, the following passage in Sainte-Beuve's essay upon Balzac. Balzac, he says, said somewhere of a sculptor who had become discouraged: "redevenu artiste *in partibus*, il avait beaucoup de succès dans les salons, il était consulté par beaucoup d'amateurs; *il passa critique*

out as lavishly as wealth, and who need never condescend to thoughts of their natural needs. It is the love of Romeo and Juliet amidst the gardens of Verona; or rather the love of Aladdin of the wondrous lamp for some incomparable beauty, deserving to be enshrined in a palace erected by the hands of genii. The passion of the lover must be vivid and splendid enough to stand out worthily against so gorgeous a background; and it must flash and glitter, and dazzle our commonplace intellects.

In the "Arabian Nights" the lover repeats a passage of poetry and then faints from emotion, and Mr Disraeli's

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comme sous les impuissants qui mentent à leurs débuts." Sainte-Beuve, naturally indignant at a phrase aimed against his craft, if not against himself, says that this may be true of a sculptor or painter who deserts his art in order to talk; "mais, dans l'ordre de la penseé, cette parole de M. de Balzac qui revient souvent sous la plume de toute une, école de jeunes littérateurs, est à la fois (je leur en demande bien pardon) une injustice et une erreur."—"Causeries du lundi," vol. ii. p. 455. A very similar phrase is to be found in a book where one would hardly look for such epigrams, Marryat's "King's Own." But to trace such witticisms to their first source is a task for "Notes and Queries." I know not where the quoted passage is to be found in Balzac, and cannot now hunt for this sharp needle in so vast a bottle of hay; otherwise I think that I could also find in Balzac the original of the passage in which Lothair calls a hansom-cab "the gondola of London." There are similar gondolas in Paris. I of course do not mean to insinuate the ugly word plagiarism should be applied to these coincidences or borrowings.

lovers are apt to be as demonstrative and ungovernable in their behaviour. Their happy audacity makes us forget some little defects in their conduct. Take, for example, the model love-story in Henrietta Temple. Told by a cold and unimaginative person, it would run to the following effect:—Ferdinand Armine was the heir of a decayed Catholic family. Going into the army, he raised great sums, like other thoughtless young men, on the strength of his expectations from his maternal grandfather, a rich nobleman. The grandfather, dying, left his property to Armine's cousin, Katharine Grandison. Armine instantly made up his mind to marry his cousin and the property, and his creditors were quieted by news of his engagement. Meanwhile he met Henrietta Temple, and fell in love with her at first sight. In spite of his judicious reticence, Miss Temple heard of his engagement to Miss Grandison, and naturally broke off the match. She fell into a consumption, and he into a brain fever. The heroes of novels are never the worse for a brain fever or two, and young Armine, though Miss Grandison becomes aware of the Temple episode, has judgment enough to hide it from everybody else, and the first engagement is not ostensibly broken off. Nay, Armine still continues to raise

loans on the strength of it—a proceeding which sounds very like obtaining money on false pretences. His creditors, however, become more pressing, and at last he gets into a sponging-house. Meanwhile Miss Temple has been cured of her consumption by the heir to a dukedom, and herself becomes the greatest heiress in England by an unexpected bequest. She returns from Italy, engaged to her new lover, and hears of her old lover's misfortunes. And then a "happy thought" occurs to the two pairs of lovers. If Miss Temple's wealth had come earlier, she might have married Armine at first: why should she not do it now? It only requires an exchange of lovers, which is instantly effected. The heir to the dukedom marries the rich Miss Grandison; the rich Miss Temple marries Ferdinand Armine; and everybody lives in the utmost splendour ever afterwards. The moral to this edifying narrative appears to be given by the waiter at the sponging-house. "It is only poor devils nabbed for their fifties and their hundreds that are ever done up," says this keen observer. "A nob was never nabbed for the sum you are, sir, and never went to the wall. Trust my experience, I never knowed such a thing."

This judicious observation, translated into the

language of art, gives Mr Disraeli's secret. His "nobs" are so splendid in their surroundings, such a magical light of wealth, magnificence, and rhetoric is thrown upon all their doings, that we are cheated into sympathy. Who can be hard upon a young man whose behaviour to his creditors may be questionable, but who is swept away in such a torrent of gorgeous hues? The first sight of Miss Temple is enough to reveal her dazzling complexion, her violet-tinted eyes, her lofty and pellucid brow, her dark and lustrous locks. Love for such a being is the "transcendent and surpassing offspring of sheer and unpolluted sympathy." It is a rapture and a madness; it is to the feelings of the ordinary mortal what sunlight is to moonlight, or wine to water. What wonder that Armine, "pale and trembling, withdrew a few paces from the overwhelming spectacle, and leant against a tree in a chaos of emotion? A delicious and maddening impulse thrilled his frame; a storm raged in his soul; a big drop quivered on his brow; and a slight foam played upon his lip." But "the tumult of his mind gradually subsided; the fleeting memories, the saddening thoughts, that for a moment had coursed about in such wild order, vanished and melted away, and a feeling of bright

serenity succeeded—a sense of beauty and joy, and of hovering and circumambient happiness." In short, he asked the lady in to lunch. That is the love which can only be produced in palaces. Your Burns may display some warmth of feeling about a peasant-girl, and Wordsworth cherish the domestic affections in a cottage; but for the dazzling, brilliant forms of passion we must enter the world of magic, where diamonds are as plentiful as blackberries, and all surrounding objects are turned to gold by the alchemy of an excited imagination. The only difference is that, while other men assume that the commonest things will take a splendid colour as seen through a lover's eyes, Mr Disraeli takes care that whatever his lovers see shall have a splendid colouring.

Once more, if we consent for the time to take our author's view—and that is a necessary condition for enjoying most literature—we must admit the vivacity and, at times, the real eloquence of Mr Disraeli's rhetoric. In Contarini Fleming he takes a still more ambitious flight, and with considerable success. Fleming, the embodiment of the poetic character, is, we might almost say, to other poets what Armine is to other lovers. He has the same love of brilliant effects, and the same absence of genuine

tenderness. But one other qualification must be made. We feel some doubts as to his being a poet at all. He has indeed that amazing vitality with which Mr Disraeli endows all his favourite heroes, and in which we may recognise the effervescence of youthful genius. But his genius is so versatile that we doubt its true destination. His first literary performance is to write a version of Vivian Grey, a reckless and successful satire; his most remarkable escapade is to put himself at the head of a band of students, apparently inspired by Schiller's Robbers to emulate the career of Moor; his greatest feat is a sudden stroke of diplomacy which enables him to defeat the plans of more veteran statesmen. And when he has gone through his initiation, wooed and won his marvellous beauty, and lost her in an ideal island, the final shape of his aspirations is curiously characteristic. Having become rich quite unexpectedly—for he did not know that he was to be the hero of one of Mr Disraeli's novels—he resolved to "create a paradise." He bought a Palladian pile, with a large estate and beautiful gardens. In this beautiful scene he intends to erect a Saracenic palace full of the finest works of modern and ancient art; and in time he hopes to "create a scene which may

rival in beauty and variety, though not in extent, the villa of Hadrian, whom I have always considered the most accomplished and sumptuous character of antiquity." He has already laid the foundation of a tower which is to rise to a height of at least a hundred and fifty feet, and is to equal in solidity and design the most celebrated works of antiquity. Certainly the scheme is magnificent; but it is scarcely the ambition which one might have expected from a poet. Rather it is the design of a man endowed with a genuine artistic temperament, but with a strange desire to leave some showy and tangible memorial of his labours. His ambition is not to stir men's souls with profound thought, or to soften by some new harmonies the weary complaints of suffering humanity, but to startle the world by the splendid embodiment in solid marble of the most sumptuous dreams of a cultivated imagination. Contarini Fleming, indeed, as he shows by a series of brilliant travellers' sketches, is no mean master of what may be called poetical prose. His pictures of life and scenery are vivacious, rapid, and decisive. In later years, the habit of parliamentary oratory seems to have injured Mr Disraeli's style. In "Lothair" there is a good deal of slipshod verbiage. But, in these earlier stories,

the style is generally excellent till it becomes too ambitious. It has a kind of metallic glitter, brilliant, sparkling with numerous flashes of wit and fancy, and never wanting in sharpness of effect, though it may be deficient in delicacy. Yet the author, who is of necessity to be partly identified with the hero of Contarini Fleming, is distinctly not a poet; and the incapacity is most evident when he endeavours to pass the inexorable limits. The distinction between poetry and rhetoric is as profound as it is undefinable. A true poet, as possessing an exquisite sensibility to the capacities of his instrument, does not try to get the effects of metre when he is writing without its restrictions and its advantages. Mr Disraeli shows occasionally a want of this delicacy of perception by breaking into a kind of compromise between the two which can only be called Ossianesque. The effect, for example, of such a passage as the following is, to my taste at least, simply grotesque :—

"Still the courser onward rushes; still his mighty heart supports him. Season and space, the glowing soil, the burning ray, yield to the tempest of his frame, the thunder of his nerves, and lightning of his veins.

"Food or water they have none. No genial fount, no graceful tree, rise with their pleasant company. Never a beast or bird is there, in that hoary desert bare. Nothing breaks the almighty stillness. Even the jackal's felon cry might seem a soothing melody. A grey wild cat, with snowy whiskers, out of a withered bramble stealing, with a youthful snake in its ivory teeth, in the moonlight, gleams with glee. This is their sole society."

And so on. Some great writers have made prose as melodious as verse; and Mr Disraeli can at times follow their example successfully. But one likes to know what one is reading; and the effect of this queer expression is as if, in the centre of a solemn march, were incorporated a few dancing-steps, *à propos* to nothing, and then subsiding into a regular pace. Milton wrote grand prose and grand verse; but you are never uncertain whether a fragment of "Paradise Lost" may not have been inserted by mere accident in the "Areopagitica."

Not to dwell upon such minor defects, nobody can read Contarini Fleming or Henrietta Temple without recognising the admirable talent and exuberant vitality of the author. They have the faults of juvenile performances: they are too gaudy; the author has

been tempted to turn aside too frequently in search of some brilliant epigram; he has mistaken bombast for eloquence, and mere flowery brilliance for warmth of emotion. But we might hope that longer experience and more earnest purpose might correct such defects. Alas! in the year of their publication, Mr Disraeli first entered Parliament. His next works comprised the trilogy, where the artistic aim has become subordinate to the political or biological; and some thirty years of parliamentary labours led to "Lothair," of which it is easiest to assume that it is a practical joke on a large scale, or a prolonged burlesque upon Mr Disraeli's own youthful performances. May one not lament the degradation of a promising novelist into a Prime Minister?

THE END.

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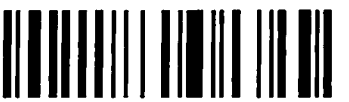
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